'JOHN THE BAPTIST'S PRAYER'

or 'The Descent into Hell' from the *Exeter Book*

Text, Translation and Critical Study

M.R. RAMBARAN-OLM

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JOHN THE BAPTIST'S PRAYER
or
THE DESCENT INTO HELL
FROM THE EXETER BOOK

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or

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FROM THE EXETER BOOK

TEXT, TRANSLATION AND CRITICAL STUDY

M. R. Rambaran-Olm

D. S. BREWER

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Abbreviations

ANCL	*Ante-Nicene Christian Library. Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, 9 vols. (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1867–1873), cited by volume and page number
ASPR	*Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, 6 vols. (New York, Columbia University Press, 1931–53)
BL	British Library
DOE	*Dictionary of Old English: A to G*. (2007). <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/doe/>.
EETS	Early English Text Society (ES: extra series; OS: original series)
KB	Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague
NPNF	*A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Series I and II, ed. P. Schaff, 28 vols. (Grand Rapids, W. B. Eerdmans, 1886–1900) cited by series and volume number
PG	*Patrologia cursus completus series Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 166 vols. (Paris, Garnier, 1857–66)
PL	*Patrologia cursus completus series Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 vols. (Paris, Garnier, 1844–55)

For Mom and Dad

Introduction

The purpose of this edition is to produce a new interpretation of the Exeter Book poem currently entitled *The Descent into Hell*. It is a poem that has been both neglected and misinterpreted over the centuries, and hence a fresh reading of the poem is long overdue. My study focuses extensively on the poem's content, meaning and the methods by which the main theme is conveyed. At the heart of this edition is a change in the poem's current title that, in my view, better reflects its central theme. However, in order to interpret the poem it is essential to have as accurate an edition of the work as possible. For that reason I also present a critical edition of the poem.

As there are several types of editions, it is important to explain why I chose specifically to undertake a critical edition and include a number of editorial practices from other types of editions for the poem I have renamed *John the Baptist's Prayer*.[1] L. Reynolds and N. Wilson argue that on its most basic level the goal of the critical editor is to reconstruct the authorial form of the text. Regarding editorial practice in general, Reynolds and Wilson claim that 'the basic essential equipment is taste, judgment, common sense and the capacity to distinguish what is wrong in a given context: as these remain the perquisite of human wit'.[2] Reynolds and Wilson are correct, since common sense, logic and critical judgement should feature highly in editing; however, one might question what is meant by 'what is wrong in a given context'. My principal purpose is to create a critical edition by establishing a text free of demonstrable errors and documenting any variants. I follow the editing principle first introduced by F. Bowers which involves leaving the critically established text free of editorial intervention and relegating comments, analysis and any other editorial matter to the Commentary and Appendices.[3] At its core, a critical edition aims to present a text that reflects the author's work as opposed to the editor's or scribe's, and while I endeavour to allow the voices of the poet and scribe to speak as much as possible through the text by presenting the established text and apparatus without self-evident errors, it would be imprudent to state that I have presented the text in its original form, especially as there has been so much damage to the manuscript with

1 I refer to the poem as *The Descent into Hell* in the first two chapters of this book, since the topics deal with historical and linguistic aspects of the poem. From Ch. 3 ff., I refer to the poem as *John the Baptist's Prayer*.

2 L. Reynolds and N. Wilson (1974), *Scribes and Scholars*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 213.

3 See F. Bowers (1959), *Textual and Literary Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 140–8. See also F. Bowers (1964), *Bibliography and Textual Criticism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 1–80.

consequent lacunae. I have included punctuation, capitalization, lineation and line numbering to help modern readers through the poem. It is important to note that the transcription produced in this edition on pp. 205–7 is consistent with those found in diplomatic editions because it reproduces as accurately as possible the current state of the text in the manuscript. Whereas the established text mediates between presenting a text that represents the poet's original and what appears in the manuscript, the transcription demonstrates the poem's transmission from poet to scribe and offers a more faithful representation of the text as it exists in the manuscript.

The textual critic W. W. Greg introduced the copy-text method of editing by distinguishing 'between the significant or . . . "substantive" readings of the text, those namely that affect the author's meaning or the essence of his expression, and others, such in general as spelling, punctuation, word-division, and the like, affecting mainly its formal presentation, which may be regarded as the accidents, or . . . "accidentals" of the text'.[4] Greg's proposal advocates editorial choice in determining which of two competing readings works most appropriately for a text. Following Greg's theory of editorial practice I have created a critical edition which focuses more on the poet's expression and the meaning within the poem, rather than presenting a diplomatic edition that most closely concentrates on the linguistic, codicological and palaeographical features of a particular manuscript. I emphasize the poem's aesthetic features, that is to say, I focus on its content and the message it conveys, while reminding readers that this is a poem, a work of art. At the core of this edition is a reinterpretation of the poem which aims, as E. B. Irving Jr states, to 'present it as now, trying to bring out its still living qualities as a still possible experience for today's readers'.[5]

With regard to the stemmatological analysis of the manuscript there is relatively little to convey. Because there is only one extant manuscript of *John the Baptist's Prayer* concerns about whether or not the edition is a 'best text' edition do not feature highly in this book. The reality is that only one manuscript has survived, so in light of this the edition is a 'best text' edition. There are no other manuscripts that contain similar passages to use for codicological, palaeographical or stemmatological analyses, although this is not to suggest that stemmatological analyses have been completely overlooked in this edition. Discussion of the manuscript as it has survived as well as an examination of what the scribal hand or hands tell us with regard to copy-text editing is included. Analysis of the scribal hand, as discussed on pp. 13–14 and 27–30 suggests that the text was copied, so the manuscript used for this edition is clearly not the authorial original.[6] Although there is no way of confirming or discrediting the notion that the poet and the scribe were one and the same, existing evidence within the Exeter Book as a whole suggests that the entire

4 Greg (1950), 'The Rationale of Copy-Text', *Studies in Bibliography* 3, 21.

5 E. B. Irving Jr (1998), 'Editing Old English Verse: The Ideal', *New Approaches to Editing Old English Verse*, ed. S. Larratt Keefer and K. O'Brien O'Keeffe. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, p. 14.

6 The scribal hand as it relates to the manuscript as opposed to the date of composition of the poem is further discussed on pp. 18–22.

manuscript was recorded by a single scribe and may have been compiled by a single anthologist at a later date.[7] Pinning down a date of composition of each text within the Exeter Book is difficult and adds to the complexity of each poem's transmission, recording and position within the manuscript. Similarly, the textual transmission of *John the Baptist's Prayer* is not straightforward and the poet and scribe share a complex relationship. Traditional editing of classical works endeavored to eliminate features of texts which were scribal rather than authorial in order to 'reverse the process of transmission and restore the words of the ancients as closely possible to the original form'.[8] B. Cerquiglini, however, argues that 'l'oeuvre littéraire, au Moyen Age, est une variable . . . qu'une main fut première, parfois, sans doute, importe moins que cette incessante récriture d'une oeuvre qui appartient à celui qui, de nouveau, la dispose et lui donne forme'.[9] As Cerquiglini notes, medieval texts are not static, rather they change and become pluralized with each stage of transmission. Textual mobility and variation are not ignored in this edition; thus the established text, translation, transcription and the digitally reconstructed text found on pp. 146–59 and pp. 205–9 offer insight into the 'mobilité essentielle du texte [tôt] medieval'.[10] The various interpretations of the text offered in this edition acknowledge different stages of the poem's transmission throughout its history from its oral roots to its recording, compilation and reconstruction, and reveal, as J. J. McGann claims, that 'the fully authoritative text is . . . always one which has been socially produced; as a result, the critical standard for what constitutes authoritativeness [does] not rest with the author and his intentions alone'.[11] With the understanding that the author and scribe of *John the Baptist's Prayer* were not the same individual, care has been taken throughout this edition to differentiate explicitly between scribal or authorial features when discussing specific aspects of the poem while also acknowledging that complete textual authority does not rest solely with the poet.

While I certainly agree that highlighting the linguistic and palaeographical features of the text offers greater understanding of the process involved in the text's creation, the linguistic analysis has not made me relinquish the goal of approaching the text from a literary viewpoint. As a result, while scrutinizing the linguistic features and examining the manuscript, the folia damage and highlighting some linguistic peculiarities, I also explore the poem's content and theme in light of the relationship between the Old English text and its audience. As M. Lapidge states, 'the manuscript, rather than the author, has come to dominate the consciousness of editors of Old English verse [and] every

7 See pp. 14–17, 59 of this edition.

8 Reynolds and Wilson (1974), p. 212.

9 'the literary work, of the Middle Ages, is a variable . . . the fact that one hand was the first is sometimes, without doubt, less important than this constant rewriting of a work which belongs to whoever fixes it and gives it a new form'. B. Cerquiglini (1989), *Éloge de la variante*. Paris: Cerf, p. 57.

10 'essential mobility of the [early] medieval text'. P. Zumthor (1972), 'Essai de poétique medieval' in *Collection Poétique*. Paris: Seuil, p. 71.

11 J. J. McGann (1983), *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 75.

last detail of the manuscript is lovingly reproduced by editors: orthography, punctuation, pointing, and so on'.[12] In other words, Lapidge contends that when editors primarily concentrate on palaeographical and codicological features, the text in many ways still remains remote to a reader. Offering little or no attention to literary aspects and features can result in a reader missing out on the primary function of the poem, its literary purpose. Thus, a central aspect of this edition is an analysis of the poem's main theme and how this message is conveyed. Referring back to Reynolds and Wilson's comment on editorial practice with regard to analysing 'what is wrong with a text', I do not merely investigate problems associated with *John the Baptist's Prayer*, whether they be codicological, thematic or other issues, but more importantly I explore the problems associated with previous interpretations of the poem. To summarize, this book offers insight into the poem's language and codicological features, but focuses more on the theological, historical and literary aspects. As a result, the edition belongs to the growing number of manuscript studies that represent both cultural process and cultural product.[13] Although 'cultural process' is often applied to archaeological analysis, I use the term here to explain that this edition explores the changes and developments within a segment of Christian thought that assisted in the creation of *John the Baptist's Prayer*. At the same time, I also explore the transmission of the poem in its manuscript form to a twenty-first-century digital representation.

The purpose for undertaking this edition derives in part from the lack of critical attention that *John the Baptist's Prayer* has received and, when it has received attention, it is either mentioned in a negative sense or referenced in a slightly patronizing manner.[14] Critical reception of the poem varies from disdain to conditional approval. Early critics like W. Mackie described some passages as a struggle, since 'it is difficult to give a sensible rendering of lines or passages that can never have been anything but incoherent babbling', while E. V. K. Dobbie further claims that it is somewhat 'clumsy and abrupt' in its transitions.[15] Following Dobbie's sentiment, T. A. Shippey argues that the poem is both clumsy and confusing, and G. K. Anderson claims that the poem's 'poetic presentation is distinctly inferior' to other poems.[16] It would be incorrect to suggest that there has not been some appreciation for the text as

12 M. Lapidge (1991), 'Textual Criticism and the Literature of Anglo-Saxon England'. T. Northcote Toller Lecture 1990, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 73, 39.

13 On 'cultural process' I refer to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology*, ed. T. Darvill (2008), s.v., which defines the term as a type of research designed to analyse the changes and interactions in cultural systems and the processes by which human cultures change over time.

14 It is important to note that the earlier editions of the text focus a great deal on codicological and linguistic features, on theories of authorship and identifying the speaker/s; however, all previous editions fail to address the intricacies of the poem's contents and its main theme. See Ch. 3, n. 1, for further discussion of earlier editions.

15 W. Mackie (ed.) (1934), *The Exeter Book. Part II: Poems IX–XXXII*. London: EETS os 194, Oxford University Press, p. vii. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K Dobbie (eds.) (1936), *The Exeter Book*, *ASPR* III, p. lxii.

16 T. A. Shippey (1976), *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, p. 42. See also Ch. 3, n. 16. G. K. Anderson (1949, repr. 1997), *The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons*. New York: Russell & Russell, p.174.

several scholars offer positive and constructive small-scale studies. For instance, R. Trask highlights the message of harmony and claims that 'in totality the poem seems an admirable unity'.[17] In T. D. Hill's examination of several cryptic passages in the poem he comments on the 'epic qualities of the poem's theme and its language . . . [and] show[s] that the *Descent into Hell* is aesthetically and intellectually coherent as a work of art'.[18] Similarly, P. Conner assesses the poem's structure and concludes that the poet cleverly uses liturgical signals throughout the poem.[19] Rather than discussing vexing passages in the poem, its originality in connection with the Lenten season is applauded and further analysed in separate articles by C. B. Hieatt and Z. Izydorczyk.[20]

Despite some scholarly praise for the poem, the overall consensus is that 'when all allowance has been made for the modes of "typological understanding"',[21] the poem's contents are still troublesome and problematic.[22] The poem is structurally and thematically complex and with the lacunae aside it is a struggle to identify the main theme because it is not made fully explicit within the text. While I applaud efforts to represent the poem in a more positive light, I maintain that it is more than simply a charming little piece. Rather, I will argue that the poem is multifaceted and the theme is conveyed in a highly sophisticated and methodical manner.

The main reasoning behind such restrained appreciation is because the poem still confuses scholars in terms of its theme and content. Key questions to be addressed in this book include: What is the poem's main theme? What is the main function of the poem? What indicators in the poem assist in identifying its main theme? And does the current title represent the poem's main theme? The poem does not have a *descensus* narrative at its core, so the most obvious question is: what is the poem about? To these questions, I suggest a solution which is at the core of this edition. Previous critical analysis has focused on what the poem lacks in relation to typical narratives dealing with the *descensus* rather than examining the poem as it exists, along with its intricacies, wordplay, and imagery. What many critics who find the poem's theme problematic fail to realize is that the exclusion of specific characteristics typical of *descensus* narratives has a specific purpose, and the reason why readings of the poem are often difficult is because it is approached under the false assumption that it is essentially a *descensus* narrative, due in part to its misleading title. I argue that

17 R. Trask (1971), '"The Descent into Hell" of the Exeter Book', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 72, 434.

18 T. D. Hill (1972), 'Cosmic Stasis and the Birth of Christ: The Old English *Descent into Hell*, Lines 99–106', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 61, 388.

19 P. Conner (1980), 'The Liturgy and the Old English "Descent into Hell"', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 79, 179–91. Liturgy and its connection to the poem are discussed in more detail in Ch. 3.

20 C. B. Hieatt (1990), 'Transition in the Exeter Book *Descent into Hell*. The Poetic Use of a Stille yet Geondflow[ende] River', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 91, 431–8 and Z. Izydorczyk (1990), 'The Inversion of Paschal Events in the Old English "Descent into Hell"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 91, 439–47.

21 Shippey (1976), p. 42.

22 See pp. 12, 17 and 25 for discussion on the lacunae. See also pp. 208–9 for a facsimile image of one damaged folio and its reconstructed counterpart.

the central focus is not to articulate the apocryphal account of Christ's Descent into Hell; rather, it is on baptism, and an appreciation of John the Baptist's role is crucial to understanding the poem's content, structure and purpose.

Chapter 1 provides historical, palaeographical and linguistic analyses of the folios that contain the poem while offering an examination of the leaves in the wider context of the history of the Exeter Book codex and its compilation. Close examination of the manuscript in Exeter has led to a number of palaeographical discoveries and confirmation of some previous conjectures.[23] This chapter is further supported with linguistic analysis on pp. 22–7 which serves to highlight specific features scrutinized by previous critics. Great effort is made to resolve previously identified cruces wherever possible, while also calling attention to noteworthy features such as one hapax legomenon and one neologism in the text.[24] Although considerable attention is paid to the tangible evidence of the manuscript and text, I devote the subsequent chapters of this book to an investigation of the poem's main theme and examine how the poem's title misrepresents the foremost topic being articulated. Thus, my editorial approach 'in this schema is less the giant of nineteenth-century philology than a technician whose job it is to present the "text" in its multivalent forms'.[25]

While the poem's main theme is arguably not a narrative about the Descent, it is important to understand the history of church doctrine on this topic and how it was understood in the Anglo-Saxon period. Chapter 2 discusses the background history of the Harrowing of Hell, its complex nature and evolution within ecclesiastical history and its appeal for Anglo-Saxons. Further discussed in the chapter is the complex nature and long history of the doctrine's origin within the church along with an analysis of its commentators. The analysis includes an examination of the evolution of the *descensus* theme from the first century until the tenth, supplemented by the catalogue contained in Appendix 1. This examination demonstrates through historical and theological analysis the doctrine's popularity and survival despite having little biblical support, while also providing a record of the complicated thought process involved in its establishment through the words of the theologians and Christian commentators who helped shape the doctrine. The results of investigating the origins of the *descensus* reveal how the doctrine became so attractive in its narrative form that it eventually permeated Anglo-Saxon art and literature outside monastic walls, and more importantly for this edition, helped explain the poet's starting point for his own narrative on baptism and redemption. Chapter 2, therefore, examines where the tradition of Christ's Descent originated, what its appeal entailed, and how any given poet could reinterpret and borrow from this Christian tradition to create a unique piece.

Chapter 3 provides the literary analysis of the poem, focusing firstly on the title, how it has affected the poem's interpretation and why a name change is

[23] See Ch. 1, n. 9, for a list of conjectural readings and proposed reconstructions.
[24] See further discussion of *bimengdest* (line 93) and *end* (line 71) on p. 26.
[25] K. O'Brien O'Keeffe (1998), 'Introduction', in *New Approaches to Editing Old English Verse*, ed. S. Larratt Keefer and K. O'Brien O'Keeffe. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, p. 8.

important. This is central to the edition. Many modern readers' expectations of the content of a text are triggered by the title of the work, so the title is of major significance. Thus, the misleading title *The Descent into Hell* makes it easy to see why the content is confusing. My proposed title acts as a guide, as it leads to an interpretation of the poem that is focused on John and the baptismal theme as conveyed through liturgical echoes in a prayer-like manner. What follows is a discussion on the poet's treatment of time, how he fuses the heroic tradition with his Christian theme, the liturgical structure of the poem, the emphasis on baptism and the dramatic force in the poem that emphasizes text and audience interaction. Whereas previous scholars like Dobbie have slighted the structural cohesiveness of the poem, subsections 2–6 in Chapter 3 demonstrate that the poem's structure is straightforward, while demonstrating how the language and overall structure work together to reveal the baptismal message of the poem. The various readings of the text in this chapter show what guided the poet in his deviation from traditional renderings of the *descensus*, thus demonstrating that he was not inspired so much by a textual source, but by didactic instinct. The poet exploits the ideas that Christ's Descent contains a universal message and provides an opportunity through re-enactment for Christians to participate in baptism. This chapter examines how the timely baptismal message revealed through the homiletic language and imagery shares strong associations with the Lenten season, and it further highlights how temporal references work to urge the poem's Anglo-Saxon audience into immediate action.

While continuing to highlight the poem's main theme, Chapter 4 provides a comparative analysis of other literary treatments of the *descensus*. The fourth-century *Gospel of Nicodemus* provides the first narrative account of Christ's Harrowing of Hell; thus Chapter 4 begins with a comparison of the apocryphal text in relation to *John the Baptist's Prayer*. This assessment offers insight into the original narrative which laid the groundwork for subsequent texts; however, when compared to *John the Baptist's Prayer*, the striking dissimilarities re-emphasize the fact that the poet's deviation from the apocryphal source is intentional, thus further enforcing the poem's main theme. Subsections 2 and 3 focus on the antiphonal passages in *John the Baptist's Prayer* as they relate to similar passages in *Blickling Homily VII, Christ and Satan* and *Christ I*, and although similar in form and in terms of whom they address, the antiphons in these other texts are dissimilar in tone to those in *John the Baptist's Prayer*. Analysis of these antiphons in comparison with *John the Baptist's Prayer* shows the poem to be consistently didactic while emphasizing passivity exercised by certain characters, as opposed to calling attention to spiritual warfare and the cosmic struggle between Christ and Satan. Further analysis of the antiphons illustrates that other texts vary in their treatment of the *descensus* and correspond more closely to a specific scene unfolding within the whole *descensus* narrative. Subsection 4 provides an analysis of all other treatments of the *descensus* narrative in Old English poetry, while demonstrating creative and diverse approaches to the *descensus* theme, which further establishes the foremost theme in *John the Baptist's Prayer*.

In the concluding subsection in Chapter 4, a short analysis of the themes of the *descensus* and baptism in Anglo-Saxon art is presented in relation to the poem. To discuss visual art relating to either the Harrowing or the baptismal sacrament would be a book in itself; however, in subsection 5, two pieces are examined, chosen firstly because they are important art-works dating from the late Anglo-Saxon period and secondly because, I argue, they provide further revelation of the poem's main theme and also reveal how both theological subjects were important topics of representation in art as well as literature within the Anglo-Saxon period.

Pages 146–59 contain the established text and translation. With regard to the former my approach, as briefly discussed on pp. 1–2, is to mediate between a text which closely represents the poet's original composition and a text that will not look overly remote to modern readers. Thus, punctuation is added to facilitate reading, but orthography, letters and spelling are only changed in instances where there is most obviously a scribal error. When necessary, in cases where scribal errors are obvious or manuscript readings questionable, I make appropriate emendations and then give clear explanations in a footnote, with further discussion of my emendations in the subsequent Commentary section.[26] Modern punctuation serves to facilitate understanding by making the text accessible to the modern reader. Moreover, by formatting the text with the conventional line layout and caesura, I present the text in a manner that facilitates an appreciation of how the poem might have originally been read.

Regarding line numbering, I follow most editors who claim that there are 137 lines in the poem. Mackie first suggested a 138-line scheme, but this number scheme is not entirely convincing. The rationale behind his line numbering is due in part to the lacunae that has destroyed several words; thus he suggests that there is room for another line. However, the alliteration of the line and the size of the lacuna seem to suggest otherwise, as discussed later. Close examination of the folio in the Exeter Book was carried out and digital reconstructions were developed to aid in validating or disproving several theories relating to the words that might have been part of the missing lines. As a result of personal examination of the folios and undertaking digital reconstruction I provide evidence that the 137-line poem works coherently, even more so than its previously suggested 138-line counterpart.[27]

While some translations attempt to reflect the alliterative practices of the original poem in their choice of present-day English vocabulary, I have chosen to present the translation more literally in order to demonstrate the baptismal

[26] Some examples of this are illustrated in lines 6 (*rēone*), 8 (*blīðne*), 62 (*monigne*), and 129 (*þēah*) and accompanying notes in the Commentary. While J. Cramer and F. Holthausen go beyond corrections where the text necessitates it, making changes, corrections and additions to the text for interpretative reasons, on the other hand, C. Grein, B. Thorpe and I. Gollancz are inclined to retain the manuscript forms as long as they make sense and are identifiable. *ASPR* is inconsistent in its treatment of the linguistic data, and adopts corrections rather unsystematically. W. Mackie retains manuscript forms, while T. A. Shippey emends the text on account of interpretation. B. Muir provides corrections where manuscript evidence exists, while also adopting some spelling alterations based on previous scholarly interpretation.

[27] See nn. 22 and 23.

message in the poem. My glossary aims to provide a wider range of possible meanings, rather than simply providing modern synonyms. My decision to present the translation by retaining the line-by-line structure of Old English verse, as opposed to presenting it as a prose text, will allow a reader to compare words from an Old English line with its translated counterpart in instances when comparison necessitates, while at the same time not simply presenting the poem as a block of prose text.

In summary: my intention in this edition is to demonstrate how misreadings of the poem have been caused, in part, by the misleading title, as the poem's central theme is not concerned with Christ's actual Descent. What the book proves is that the poem is not inferior to other *descensus* narratives, and that previous scholarship has failed to distinguish between a text in which the content is inferior in quality and one that has been misinterpreted.

1

Palaeography, Codicology and Language

THE EXETER BOOK MANUSCRIPT

The Exeter Book, also known as manuscript 3501 in the Library of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral in Exeter, contains the only extant text of *The Descent into Hell* or *John the Baptist's Prayer*. Dating of the manuscript has not gone without controversy, since it has been difficult to date the specific poetic works within the manuscript.[1] Despite this dating controversy the manuscript is generally attributed to the latter half of the tenth century, and codicological and literary evidence suggests that the entire manuscript was both designed and copied *c.* 965–75. The Exeter Book may very well be 'the oldest surviving book of vernacular poetry from Anglo-Saxon England'[2] and has been at Exeter after it was given to the resident Bishop Leofric (1016–72) who moved the Episcopal see to Exeter from Crediton in 1050.[3] Before Leofric's death on 10 February 1072, he requested the compilation of an itemized donation list comprised of books and religious artifacts with the intention of leaving the listed items to Exeter Cathedral and its community.[4] The item listed as *-i- mycel englisc boc be gehwilcu(m) þingu(m) on leoðwisan geworht*[5] is, with reasonable certainty, said to be the earliest reference to the Exeter Book, although scholarly identification is not completely conclusive. P. Conner argues that there seems to be a substantial amount of evidence to suggest that the manuscript was written in either Crediton or Exeter. He supports his claim with evidence including the manuscript's date and its association with other manuscripts either from Exeter or connection to Leofric, notwithstanding its most certain mention in the donation list.[6]

1 For a detailed discussion on the complexity of dating the codices in the Exeter Book see B. J. Muir (ed.) (2000), *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. Exeter: Short Run Press, pp. 1–3.

2 Ibid., p. 1.

3 For a discussion concerning the dates of Leofric's episcopal activity, life and death see F. Barlow (1972), 'Leofric and his Times', *Leofric of Exeter: Essays in Commemoration of the Foundation of Exeter Cathedral Library in A.D. 1072*, ed. F. Barlow *et al*. Exeter: Exeter University Press, pp. 1–16.

4 Muir (2000), p. 2, n. 7, claims that internal evidence indicates that the list was most likely drawn up in the period 1069–72. See also M. Förster (1933), 'Zum Exeter-Kodex', *Beiblatt zur Anglia* 44, 14–15.

5 On fol. 1v of manuscript 3501. Translation: '-i- a large English book about various things, written in verse'.

6 P. Conner (1993), *Anglo-Saxon Exeter. A Tenth-Century Cultural History. Studies in Anglo-Saxon History*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, pp. 48–94.

The manuscript consists of 131 fols. with at least one missing folio. However, the four leaves which are relevant to this study (fols. 119*v*–121*v*) have survived, albeit with several lacunae.[7] The manuscript has suffered from various types of damage, suggesting that its survival became dependent on its practical use, possibly as a cutting board and stabilizer for a messy pot in the scriptorium. Among the most visible damage there remain a number of slashes beginning on fol. 8, the first page of the manuscript, indicating that it was used as a cutting board. Evidence also reveals that the codex was used to stabilize a messy pot, exposing the first folio to a circular stain caused by a liquid substance that might have been glue. As though liquid damage was not enough, the manuscript was also exposed to fire, as burn marks are now visible on what was once the exposed back of the codex. Missing strips of various folios have also been sporadically cut out of the manuscript, rendering the text either illegible or difficult to read in some instances. Unlike some of the uses of the manuscript that have left it with scars and irreparable damage, its use to store gold-leaf at some point has left rather charming effects, resulting in a shimmery residue.[8]

The most severe damage, that being the diagonal ash-burn, is of relevance to this study since the burn-mark has affected the last fourteen folios of the manuscript, three of which are scrutinized here. Although the initial traces of the burn are on fol. 117*r*, losses to the manuscript become increasingly larger and fols. 120*r*–121*v* contain large lacunae in the middle of the text which make it impossible to read various lines within the text.[9]

GATHERINGS AND FOLIO PREPARATION

The circumstances surrounding the manuscript's compilation have not gone without debate, and although some argue that the codex is most likely one complete unit, studies by Conner observe that the manuscript is a gathering of three separate booklets.[10] B. J. Muir states that preparation of each gathering of the manuscript was achieved in the same manner, as 'the four bifolia

7 The second half of fol. 119 (which is the first leaf in the quire) has been lost. For further information on this see J. Pope (1974), 'An Unexpected Lacuna in the Exeter Book: Divorce Proceedings for an Ill-matched Couple in the Old English Riddles', *Speculum* 49, 615–22.

8 A detailed chart and analysis of the folios containing remnants of gold-leaf in the Exeter Book is available in B. J. Muir (1989), 'A Preliminary Report on a New Edition of the Exeter Book', *Scriptorium* 43.2, 284–8, col. 10.

9 For various readings and theories concerning the missing words see remarks at lines 30b–31a, 32, 60, 61, 90–3, 94, 123, and 124–5 of the Commentary. See also my article (2007), 'Two Remarks in the Exeter Book's "Descent into Hell"', *Notes and Queries* 54, 1–2.

10 See P. Conner (1986), 'The Structure of the Exeter Book Codex (Cathedral Library, MS 3501)', *Scriptorium* 40, 233–42. Although Conner bases his claims that the manuscript can be divided into three separate booklets on palaeographical observations and literary relationships among the texts, several critics have reservations about this assertion. See Muir (1989), pp. 83–4, and (2000), pp. 22–3; D. Megginson (1992), 'The Written Language of Old English Poetry', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto; and F. Gameson and R. Gameson (1995), 'Review of P. W. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth Century Cultural History*', *Notes and Queries* 42, 228–30. For further discussion of the codex division theory see the 'Anthologist and sectional divisions' portion of this edition.

were folded and pricked along a vertical ruling, then laid out flat and ruled horizontally'.[11] He further notes that once the vertical pricks and horizontal ruling were in place, deeply impressed ruling frames were positioned, with the folia containing *The Descent into Hell* being no exception. My observation of the manuscript confirms Muir's description of the codex, especially in relation to *The Descent into Hell* poem. Fols. 119*v*–121*v* include the vertical and horizontal rulings that are evident on other folia within the manuscript. Close examination of the five leaves containing *The Descent into Hell* poem indicates that the scribe carefully observed the visible margins, keeping a consistently uniform writing frame.

THE SCRIBE AND SCRIPT

The most detailed and comprehensive analysis of the script appears in Conner's monograph, in his earlier codicological analysis and Muir's anthology.[12] Conner offers useful tables regarding variation and distribution of certain letters throughout the codex, but most of his attention focuses on analysis of the script to support his argument that the codex comprises three booklets. Muir records further occurrences of specific word forms in a number of tables, but the description of the script and scribe described in his anthology is brief. While Muir and Conner disagree on the manuscript's compilation, they both agree with previous observations made by Ker and Sisam that there was a single scribe. Because there is insufficient evidence to prove that there is more than one scribe, I agree with previous editors who argue that there was a single accomplished scribe. What is important to this study is that the scribe who copied out *The Descent into Hell* wrote in square Anglo-Saxon minuscule with some examples of uncial forms. The majority of letter forms are minuscule, but the scribal hand uses both uncial and minuscule forms for the letter *s* (*s* and *ſ*) and the uncial form for *d* (ð) is used in *The Descent into Hell*. There is variation of thickness in various letter forms. For instance, the letter *m* demonstrates thick vertical strokes, the letter *b* exhibits an alternation of thick and thin strokes on the square axis, while the letter *g* illustrates the alternation of thick and thin strokes on the diagonal axis. The script in *The Descent into Hell* is consistent with that of the rest of the codex, especially in the scribe's adherence to the line guides on each folio. As a result of the line guides some letters like *m*, *n*, and *u* are often flattened or leveled along the top. My observations of the script contained on fols. 119*v*–121*v* reaffirm R. Flower's description of the general appearance of the script. He states:

> The script achieves a liturgical, almost monumental effect by the stern character of its design and the exact regularity of its execution. . . . The line of writing, by the marked flattening of certain letters, has the effect of being level along the top, but the danger of monotony is avoided by the strong ascenders and

[11] Muir (2000), p. 12.
[12] See Conner (1993), pp. 60–80, (1986), pp. 237–40 and Muir (1989), pp. 282–3.

> descenders which necessarily abound in Anglo-Saxon script. These combine with narrow treatment of such letters as *u*, *m*, *n* to give the whole page of script a marked up-and-down character which contributes greatly to the set, archaic aspect of the writing. But this impression is to some extent alleviated by certain calligraphic delicacies such as the use of fine hair-lines as decorative adjuncts or finishing strokes to certain letters . . . and the variety of forms employed for a number of the letters makes it clear that the manuscript was produced in a scriptorium in which the art of writing was carefully studied and where many older manuscripts of insular hands were available for study and imitation.[13]

Two small capital letters are used on leaf 119*v* (*ON*) to indicate the beginning of the poem and there are no ornamental letters or decorative motifs on the folia containing *The Descent into Hell* poem. Abbreviations and apices are further discussed on pp. 20–1 and 22 of this chapter.

THE ANTHOLOGIST AND SECTIONAL DIVISIONS

Although earlier critics contend that the anthologist put little if any thought into organizing the manuscript, there is a growing number of scholars who suggest that there is a purpose and order in the way the texts within the codex were compiled.[14] Analysis of the Exeter Book's contents in relation to its anthologist raises a number of important questions such as: Who was the anthologist and were he and the scribe the same person? Was the anthologist simply a patron who requested a specific selection of texts? Was there more than one anthologist? For some of these questions, a considerable amount of analysis has only provided continued speculation. Whether the scribe and anthologist were different people is impossible to know. However, given the way the anthology is divided, it seems highly unlikely that the anthologist was merely a patron with a request for a selection of *leoðwisan*.[15] The organization of the contents of the anthology is not arbitrary and the anthologist's direct involvement with the compilation seems most likely.

Whether or not the anthologist and scribe were one and the same begs further questions. If the anthologist was the scribe, did he refer to a single exemplar, copying the texts mechanically, or was he compiling the texts

[13] R. Flower (1933), 'The Script of the Exeter Book', in *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry*, ed. R. W. Chambers, M. Förster and R. Flower. London: Percy Lund, Humphries and Co., p. 83.

[14] See K. Sisam (1953, repr. 1962), *Studies in the History of Old English Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Sisam contends that the placing of Christ in judgement after the Ascension 'can be explained as a modest power of arrangement in a compiler' (p. 11). See also N. F. Blake (ed.) (1964), *The Phoenix*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Blake further suggests that 'the Exeter Book differs from the other three poetic codices in that it is a poetic miscellany in which there does not appear to have been a recognizable principle of selection' (p. 2). For further reading on the compilation and sectional divisions see Muir (2000), pp. 16–25; and Conner (1986). For select reading on booklets within manuscripts see P. R. Robinson (1978), 'Self-Contained Units in Composite Manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Period', in *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts. Basic Readings*, ed. M. P. Richards. London: Routledge, pp. 25–35; and P. R. Robinson (1980), 'The "Booklet": A Self-Contained Unit in Composite Manuscripts', in *Codicologica 3: Essais typologiques*, ed. A. Gruijs and J. P. Gumbert. Leiden: Brill, p. 48.

[15] Literally 'poetical manner', meaning 'verse'.

to suit a different structural or thematic plan? What is the origin of the collection of poems in the Exeter Book and were they selected from pre-existing poetic collections? Were the poems copied as a single entity or in three separate booklets? And finally, can *The Descent into Hell* offer any evidence in determining the scribe, anthologist and the compilation of the entire codex?

Two arguments have been made about the organization of the codex. One by Conner contends that the anthology consists of three separate booklets possibly written in a non-linear pattern; while Muir, on the other hand, argues that a thematic link throughout the anthology suggests that there is evidence of a thoughtful and more systematic arrangement of the poems within the Exeter Book.[16] Although a definitive conclusion cannot be made to this question, some convincing observations about the codex as an anthology can be made. Muir contends that 'it has been observed that the most apparent organizational feature of the manuscript is that the long poems all come at the beginning, though not much more can be said about its structure'.[17] However, there seems to be more to the compiling of the poems other than just the number of lines each text contains. Although scholars like Conner and Muir may not completely agree on where the sectional divisions occur, I argue, like them, that the poems in the entire codex were placed with thematic relationships in mind.[18]

There certainly seems to be a strong thematic link that runs throughout the anthology and *The Descent into Hell*'s location within the Exeter Book attests to that conclusion.[19] From *Christ I* to *Juliana*, which are in fact the largest poems in the manuscript, the first eight poems engage with various models

16 Based on his codicological examinations of the booklet gatherings, binding, folios and thematic organization, Conner suggests that the three bound books were written and arranged in a 2, 3, 1 order. For further analysis see Conner (1986), pp. 233–4, and (1993), pp. 95–147. For Muir's codicological analysis see Muir (1989), pp. 275–88 and (2000), pp. 3, 16–25.

17 Muir (2000), p. 22. For additional discussion of the codex's arrangement of poems see R. M. Liuzza (1990), 'The Old English Christ and Guthlac Texts, Manuscripts and Critics', *Review of English Studies* 41, 1–11. Liuzza rightly argues that there is a contradiction in the *ASPR* editors' claim concerning sectional division in the anthology. On the one hand, the *ASPR* editors contend that the scribe's judgement is evident in the manner in which the sectional divisions are placed within the manuscript, yet on the other, they disregard their previous argument 'on several occasions (*Riddles* 3, 43, 48) neglecting to note the secondary division of *Ascension* at fol. 15a (line 517)' (p. 3). See Muir (2000), p. 23, for a more detailed analysis of the structure of the poems grouped together at the beginning of the codex.

18 See Ch. 3, pp. 58–9, for further analysis of the poem's place within the Exeter Book in relation to thematic links throughout the codex. For further arguments concerning the thematic links within the Exeter Book see Muir (2000), p. 22, n.63; C. Chase (1974), 'God's Presence Through Grace as the Theme of Cynewulf's Christ II and the Relationship of this to *Christ I and Christ III*', *Anglo-Saxon England* 3, 87–101; Liuzza (1990, 6–10); J. Roberts (1979) (ed.), *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 29–31; L. K. Shook (1961), 'The Prologue of the Old English Guthlac', *Medieval Studies* 23, 294–30; and L. K. Shook (1960), 'The Burial Mound in Guthlac A', *Modern Philology* 58, 1–10.

19 What is illustrated here is that the thematic links in the Exeter Book are strong; however, I am not suggesting that the sections that I describe here form the actual structure of the codex, rather there are definite thematic links that bring the manuscript together as a unit. Until there is substantial codicological evidence that the Exeter Book was arranged in a 2, 3, 1 order, as Conner suggests (see n. 10 of this chapter), I am inclined to believe that the Exeter Book, although consisting of three booklets, was arranged in the order it has come down to us.

for Christian living, offering a smooth transition to the next section of poems from the *Wanderer* to the *Partridge* that deal with soul searching, proverbial wisdom, and the cultivation of the world and spirit. A number of poems directly preceding *The Descent into Hell* including *Judgement Day I*, and *Resignation A* and *B* as well as the four poems subsequently following *The Descent into Hell* are heavily influenced by Easter liturgy.[20] The homiletic *Judgement Day I* prompts listeners to remain penitent with their eyes on Doomsday, while *Resignation A* and *B* provide a view of the present day while offering a prayer for patience and humility on the soul's journey. *The Descent into Hell*, heavily influenced by Easter liturgy and its association with the soul's journey towards salvation confirmed through the example of baptism, is well suited to follow poems contemplating the present and future state of the soul. What follows is *Almsgiving*, continuing the theme of salvation by illustrating how generosity is required for Christians, whilst the poem *Pharaoh* deals with the Egyptian leader's army destroyed by the same waters that saved the Israelites. Although, at this point, it might seem that there is a discontinuity of theme in the Exeter Book, Muir suggests that:

> The story of the Exodus is central to the Easter liturgy and its typological structure [and] the positioning of Pharaoh [at that point] in the manuscript must be considered the work of an anthologist with a purpose – it recalls that, throughout Salvation History, for Christians life has been renewed repeatedly through water (crossing the Red Sea, Ex. 15: 21–31); springing from the rock struck by Moses in the desert (Ex. 17: 1–7); through Christ's baptism (John 1: 29–34); and from the pierced side of Christ (John 19: 34–7).[21]

The final pieces in the series consist of two prayers: firstly the *Lord's Prayer I*, which provides a modest paraphrase of the Paternoster while stressing God's observance over and aid to humanity, and *Homiletic Fragment II*, an exhortation of praise for Christians in this transient world. Set to follow the texts that first deal with the soul's journey through present and future, *The Descent into Hell* provides a fitting link as it deals with the past, whilst the poet also speaks to readers in the present and looks forward to the future life for Christians who partake in baptism. Similarly, the echoes of liturgy in *The Descent into Hell*, a poem which draws heavily on Easter imagery and closes with an exhortation to Christ, provides a strong link to the subsequent texts which emphasize renewed life through salvation, righteous living and prayer.[22] Arguably, it seems that the position of *The Descent into Hell* in the Exeter Book is no coincidence, as its place, nestled amongst texts of similar theme, provides a crucial transitional link between ideas relating to past and future representations of the soul's journey, while connecting with topics of salvation and life thereafter. The bridge that *The Descent into Hell* provides links the preceding and subsequent poems and their overriding messages

[20] The four subsequent poems are *Almsgiving*, *Pharaoh*, *Lord's Prayer I* and *Homiletic Fragment II*. It should be noted that the subject matter in *Azarias*, the sixth poem in the codex, is dominated with imagery and themes of the liturgy during Holy Week.

[21] Muir (2000), p. 24.

[22] The link with the Easter liturgy and baptism are discussed in Ch. 3, pp. 84–96.

concerning the soul and salvation; therefore, examining the literary relationship between the texts might assist in confirming or refuting existing and future codicological findings relating to the Exeter Book's compilation.

Sectional divisions in the Exeter Book are, in most cases, easily identifiable through the application of initials and/or large capital letters, blank lines or blank spaces, and general placement of the text. In the case of *The Descent into Hell*, the capital letter *O* clearly identifies the beginning of the poem and similarly the text's end is easily identifiable with the symbol ⁊ . The fact that the poem's beginning and end are clearly marked in the same manner as every other poem in the manuscript suggests that the poem is not fragmentary.[23]

THE FOLIOS, 119*v*–121*v*

As mentioned above, much has been written about the Exeter Book in its entirety, as well as a great deal of attention being focused on lengthier poems contained within the manuscript. However, the folios containing *The Descent into Hell* have not been thoroughly studied.[24] As with many folios contained in the Exeter Book, the pages containing *The Descent into Hell* include places where the ink has run along the ruling grooves in little rivulets. A pair of double vertical rulings approximately 1cm apart indicate the left and right boundaries of the writing space, running from the top to the bottom of each of the three folios. A horizontal ruling follows along the top of each folio extending to the top pricking mark that is located 3cm from the top of each folio. Likewise, the final ruling lies approx. 4.8cm from the bottom of each page. The general measurements of fols. 119*v*–121*v* are consistent with the rest of the Exeter Book. The majority of the text on the left-hand side of the folio begins 3.3cm in, while the capital letter *O* begins the text at 2.3cm from the left. The scribe is particularly careful of the text's physical form and goes to great lengths to adhere to the inner right margin by occasionally contracting letters at the end of a line. His meticulous eye reveals that he was determined that the text not extend too far beyond the writing frame. None of the three folios that contain *The Descent into Hell* are defective, which confirms that damage to the folios took place after the text was recorded. The burn marks contained within the folios have caused large lacunae to run through the middle of each page, hindering a complete reading of the poem contained within.[25]

23 Muir (2000) states that 'it is well known, that on a few occasions the scribe (or the scribe of the exemplar) has inadvertently run texts together which are now treated as discrete entities' (p. 17). He further argues that most of the irregularities are found in the *Riddles* where the mysterious nature and dissimilarity in length leads to confusion.

24 For the most detailed analyses of the Exeter Book see Muir (1989), (2000), V. 1 and 2; Conner (1986); *ASPR* III; Chambers, Förster and Flower (eds.) (1933); B. Thorpe (1842), *A Collection of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, from a Manuscript in the Library of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter, with an English Translation, Notes, and Indexes*. London: Society of Antiquaries of London, p. 459; and Mackie (1934).

25 Measurements of the ash burns and their exact location on each respective leaf are discussed in the Apparatus.

As for the parchment, Conner notes the use of different grades within the entire codex, and contends that fols. 119–21 are consistent with insular parchment.[26] He describes insular parchment as 'rather thick, with a rough, suede-like finish, with hair side and flesh side very alike in surface as well as colour'.[27] Apart from the damage discussed in the Apparatus and Commentary sections of this edition, it should be pointed out that a rectangular shape measuring 7.1cm in length and 2.2cm in height is cut out of the bottom right-hand side of fol. 120*r* and mirrored on the bottom left-hand side of 120*v*. Angling the rectangular void on fol. 120*v* four, long lines appear to have been sliced into the text. It has already been determined that the entire codex was used as a cutting board, so it may very well have been the case that the Exeter Book was open to fol. 120 when it was used for cutting purposes or perhaps this evidence gives credence to the argument that the Exeter Book was compiled at different stages.

SCRIBAL ERRORS AND CORRECTIONS

The Descent into Hell is written in a tidy hand with few scribal errors. However, the scribe made several corrections to the text.[28] It is difficult to ascertain whether the corrections were made by the main scribe or a second scribe, although most evidence in the text points to the scribe correcting his own errors in the majority of cases where errors occur. Collectively, the errors and subsequent corrections indicate that there were, at the very least, two stages of transmission. The initial spelling errors indicate that the text was first copied and the subsequent corrections, whether by the scribe or by someone else at a later date, suggest further interaction with the text. Although it is not always clear whether the corrections were completed while the scribe was initially copying the text or afterwards, most of the erasures and insertions indicated in the following list suggest that the corrections were completed after the text was completed. A number of erasures in the text include the erased word *ic*, as well as the letter *c* erased at the end of *mē* and *þē*. The erasures suggest that either the scribe or corrector removed the words and letters collectively in order to standardize spelling within the text.[29] There are a few words that appear to be incorrectly divided, giving the impression that the scribe was, at times, unaware of what he was copying, perhaps had difficulty in reading the source manuscript or possibly was spacing the words out in order to create a justified text. For example, *gehȳddan* for *ge hȳddan* (13), *ha/go steald* for *hagosteald*

[26] For more detailed descriptions of the folios see Conner (1986), pp. 234–5; Muir (2000), pp. 7–16; Förster (1933), pp. 55–65; and H. Wanley (1705), *Antiquæ literaturæ septentrionalis liber alter [seu Humphredi Wanleii librorum veterum septentrionalium catalogus, qui in Angliæ bibliothecis extant . . .*]. Oxford: Sheldon.

[27] Conner (1986), pp. 234–5.

[28] See the list of corrections on pp. 19–20 of this chapter.

[29] See Commentary on line 29 for further discussion of erasures of the letter *c* and the word *ic*. Megginson (1992), p. 179, argues that either the scribe or the corrector aimed to achieve a uniformity of spelling throughout the Exeter anthology.

(21), and *bi lōcen* for *bilōcen* (54).[30]

The following errors occur as a result of simple omission or misreading of a letter:[31]

- *weorud* for *weoruda* (42)
- *doru* for *dorum* (87) – most likely that the scribe omitted the macron sign
- *gecȳðdest* (79) in which the cross-stroke of the *ð* is omitted, but the altered letter has the form of *ð*
- *fore* for *for* (128)
- *þēan* for *þēah* (129) – as with *he* (27) and *cnyht* (79) the *h* in each instance is created by adding an ascender to the minum of the *n*. So, it appears that the scribe may have forgotten to add the ascender to the stem of the *n* in line 129.

The most common type of corrective measure taken by the scribe was to scrape away portions of or complete letters with a sharp object and make amendments where applicable. This form of correction occurs in the following cases:

- *fundon* (8) – the manuscript reads *fondon*, but the *o* is almost entirely erased. Only the top bit of the *o* remains and a small *u* is written above it.
- *gehȳddan* (13) – the *y* was originally an *n*, but the second part of the minum is scraped away and a curved descender is added to form a *y*;
- *wyn* (18) – the word is over an erasure, but there is no indication of what letters were originally there;
- *onfēng* (20) – the *f* is alteration of what was originally the letter *s*;[32]

30 Despite the spacing in between some words that would not normally contain spaces, it cannot be assumed that this spacing is necessarily incorrect. Respective word separations might be accounted for in light of general word spacing that was becoming more common in medieval manuscripts by the tenth century. With this in mind, word division would have enhanced legibility, while possibly functioning as a pedagogical aid in oral and silent readings of the poem. Förster (1933) points out that the scribe 'took great pains to have the single words very distinctly separated from each other, so that the words [stood] out much more clearly than is usual with Anglo-Saxon manuscripts' (p. 64). It was not uncommon for the scribe to separate prefixes from their root-words, as Förster further suggests. This might certainly account for the separation of *ge* from *hȳddan* and *bi* from *lōcen*. Förster also notes that nominal and verbal compounds are separated when equal or secondary stress is kept or on the second part (p. 64). This could explain the separation of *ha/go* from *steald*, so all three words might be accounted for without claiming that the word separations were a mistake. It is still worth noting, however, that the word-spacing is evident within the text and sheds light on a consistent writing pattern demonstrated by the Exeter Book scribe. See Förster (1933), pp. 64–5, for further discussion of word-spacing and corrections within the Exeter Book. For select reading on orthography and word division in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts see G. R. Owen-Crocker (ed.) (2009), *Working with Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*. Exeter: Exeter University Press, p. 95; A. Campbell (1959), *Old English Grammar*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, §29; P. Saenger (1982), 'Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society', *Viator* 13, 367–414; M. Daunt (1939), *Old English Sound-Changes Reconsidered in Relation to Scribal Tradition and Practices*. Hertford: S. Austin; and D. G. Scragg (1974), *A History of English Spelling*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

31 In addition to the errors or omissions listed above, Muir (2000), p. 345, suggests that *gedyrstum* (108) is erroneous. He contends that the tongue of the *f* is missing and the word should read *gedyrftum;* however, I do not believe this is the case. See Commentary on line 108 (pp. 174–5 of this edition) for further discussion.

32 Muir (2000), p. 36, identifies regular scribal confusion for a number of letters in which the *s-f* confusion is included. Muir notes that other instances within the Exeter Book in which the

- *hagosteald* (21) – the lower part of the second *a* is scraped away, but there seems to be no rationale behind the scraping;
- *mē* (28) – originally *mēc*;[33]
- *sētan* (81) – the manuscript contains two letter *t*'s, but the first *t* is erased;
- *oflyste* (81) – the *s* is altered from an *f* with the horizontal stroke scraped away;
- *under helle dorum* (87) – the entire phrase is over an erased area with the original text no longer visible;
- *ūs* (96) – originally *ūs ic*, with *ic* is erased;
- *þē* (101) – the manuscript contains *þēc*, but *c* is erased;
- *þē* (107) – the manuscript includes *þēc*, but *c* is erased;
- *þē* (118) – originally *þēc*, with *c* is erased;
- *þē* (124) – the manuscript reads *þēc*, but the *c* is erased;[34]
- *ūs* (126) – the manuscript contains *ūs ic*, but *ic* is erased;
- *unc* (132) – *unc* is preceded by an erased letter;
- *baþodan* (132) – *-dan* is over an erasure.

Another corrective measure employed by the scribe was to alter erroneous letters by shaping them into correct letters. This technique occurs in the following cases:

- *eorðærn* (12) – the descender in the *r* is erased to alter the subsequent *n*;
- *hē* (27) – the *h* is amended from an *n*;
- *Esāias* (46) – the second *a* is made from the letter *u*;
- *bilōcen* (54) – the *l* is altered from a *b* while the bowl of the *b* is used to create the *o*;
- *þū* (74) – originally an *h*, but altered to make a *þ*;
- *cnyht* (79) – the *h* is altered from *n* by adding an ascender, although the original serif is still visible.

Another type of correction is evident in *hwylc* (43) where the *h* is wedged in between the *w* and the *n* from the preceding word.

ABBREVIATIONS

As is noted in Krapp and Dobbie's edition of the Exeter Book, 'abbreviations are very sparingly used throughout the [entire] Exeter Book, and those which we find are of the most usual types: (1) the tilde or macron, usually over a vowel, but sometimes over a consonant, to indicate the omission of a letter or letters following, (2) þ for *þæt*, (3) 7 for *ond*, and a few of the customary abbreviations in Latin words'.[35] These common Old English abbreviations are found throughout the poem and have been expanded in this edition. The

scribe confuses forms include *þ-wynn, p-wynn, s-wynn, n-h* (which is also found at lines 27, 79 and 129 of *The Descent into Hell*) and *d-ð*.

33 Megginson (1992), pp. 200–1, argues that the scribe used *mēc*, *þēc* and *ūsic* to differentiate between accusative and dative forms, so the erasing of the *-c*, *-ic* forms may not have been applied by the scribe. For further discussion of the *-c* erasures see Commentary on line 29.

34 This refers to the second *þē* in line 124.

35 *ASPR* III, p. xix.

Tironian nota (7) occurs twenty two times for *and/ond*, the nasal tilde over a preceding vowel indicating an omitted nasal occurs in *þā* (40, 113), *þōn̄* (62, 67, 90, 114), *breostū* (97), *Iudeū* (131), and þ appears for *þæt* (12, 13, 43, 60, 66) while appearing in its full form in nine instances. In line 87 the scribe most likely left off the macron in *doru* for *dorum*.

PUNCTUATION AND APICES

Punctuation

The most common punctuation marks used in the poem are the punctus and the punctus versus.[36] Like the majority of instances where punctuses occur in other poems within the Exeter Book most points in *The Descent into Hell* appear at the end of half-lines.[37] The majority of single points throughout the text indicate medial pauses or ends of sententia. However, there is one small section within the poem where points are used for a different purpose. The punctuses are used immediately following nearly every name in a small catalogue of Patriarchs and Prophets in lines 44–6, possibly to emphasize the importance of these saints similar to the way in which italic or bold fonts can function today. The punctuses are used in connection with the abbreviated sign for *ond*, with each point placed immediately before the Tironian nota and following each proper name listed. Aside from indicating pauses and proper names there is a single point identifying the beginning of John's speech on leaf 120*b*. In this edition's text and translation, I indicate the previously noted single point with a colon. Given that the instances where each punctus is placed throughout fols. 119*v*–121*v* correspond most often with medial and final pauses, the arrangement of punctus offers evidence that punctuation was used to mark line boundaries but it does not seem to indicate a pattern of punctuation placement directly linked to the poem's metre. The varying examples of punctūs utilized throughout the text offer clarity and function as guides for readers or possibly those who might have delivered the poem orally.

As M. B. Parkes notes:

> The study of ancient manuscripts [by Anglo-Saxon scribes] also stimulated a more sophisticated attitude to page design, and led Anglo-Saxon scribes to discipline the new features of layout introduced by their Irish teachers. In many surviving Anglo-Saxon manuscripts either the Irish 'diminuendo' effect has been restricted to the letter immediately following the initial, or each of the enlarged letters following the initial has been kept to the same size as the other in the sequence.[38]

Parkes's observation applies to *The Descent into Hell*, as the diminuendo

[36] For discussion of additional punctuation within the texts of the Exeter Book see Muir (2000), pp. 28–9.

[37] See *Widsith*, lines 18–34; 75–87 (although there are five instances where points occur in the middle of long half-lines – 76a, 80a, 81a, 83, 87a); *Fortunes of Men* has regular pointing in a clear pattern, etc. Line references correspond with Muir's anthology.

[38] M. B. Parkes (1993), *Pause and Effect. An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 26–7.

effect is identified in the opening line with the capital letter and the letter immediately following it (ON). Although the capital letter is not elaborate, its enlarged size followed by an enlarged letter *n* offers visual emphasis to the beginning of the poem.

An unusual feature in the Exeter Book and unique to *The Descent into Hell* is the punctuation that appears at the end of the poem. Following the final word in the poem is a single point which most likely indicates the end of the sententia. Parkes notes that ⁊ often indicates 'the end of a section of text' and two points presented as : often 'indicates a medial pause'.[39] However, following the final line of *The Descent into Hell* reveals a combination of the two symbols presented as :⁊. The variation of the punctus versus indicated in *The Descent into Hell* was often used in liturgical texts after the eighth century to 'indicate the terminatio of a psalm verse, and the completion of a sentential or periodus'.[40] While the single point at the end of the poem indicates an end to the poem's closing statement, the following symbol :⁊ which was often used in liturgical texts reveals the poem's end and offers clues as to the liturgical structure of the poem.[41] The punctuation throughout the text seems to suggest that the poem was read aloud because each symbol presented throughout the text corresponds more closely with the poem's content signalling instances where pauses and stops occurred during oral delivery. That the poem was read aloud is also suggested by the fact that the final punctuation mark was most often used to indicate the end of liturgical texts. Thus, the poem may have been used for public worship.[42]

Apices

There are three instances of apices in the text. The *a* in *fah* (63) the first *a* in *adread* (70), and the conjunction *a* (73) all contain long oblique strokes above each aforementioned letter. As noted by Parkes, the 'long strokes placed over certain vowels assist[ed] a reader to recognize them and hence pronounce them correctly'.[43] Therefore, the apices in the poem facilitate correct pronunciation of the poem and offer further indication that the text was read aloud.

DATE, PROVENANCE AND LANGUAGE OF THE MANUSCRIPT

The dating of the manuscript is both challenging and controversial. All approximate dates attributed to the codex's origin fall within fifty years (965–1015). Although the Exeter Book is said to be the oldest of the four Old English codices, the Vercelli Book is directly comparable and there is the

39 Ibid. pp. 306 and 28, respectively.
40 Ibid. p. 307.
41 For further discussion of the liturgical structure of the poem see Ch. 3.
42 Parkes (1993), p. 307.
43 Ibid., p. 302.

possibility that it may be slightly older than the Exeter Book.[44] The creation of the Exeter Book has been assigned to the latter half of the tenth century, so that the approximate date indicates a point of reference for dating the composition of *The Descent into Hell*. How long before the manuscript's compilation and where it was composed are slightly more difficult questions, although K. Sisam and more recent scholars have concluded that the mechanical copying of the entire codex contains stylistic and language features that point to the Late West Saxon dialect of Old English.[45] Among the distinctive linguistic features typical of West Saxon forms in *The Descent into Hell* are:[46]

1. *hȳ, hī* forms, as Sisam states, were common during Alfred's time.[47] The three other Anglo-Saxon poetical codices (*Beowulf*, Vercelli and Junius manuscripts) which also have non-West Saxon features more often have the *hīe* form.[48]
2. The reflex of short *o* in stressed syllables before a nasal remains *o*, whereas in other Old English codices the letter *a* or *o* is found. The Exeter Book contains only forms with *o*.[49] Examples in *The Descent into Hell* include: line 95 *mon*, lines 109–10 *monna*, line 45 *monig*, line 62, *monigne*, line 77 *monþwǣre*, line 113 *moncynne*, line 33 *moncynnes*.
3. *-ie-* immediately following a palatal *g-* (line 2 *gierwan*, line 42 *wuldorgiefa*) is characteristic of Early West Saxon and is used 'more frequent[ly] in the Exeter Book than in the three other Old English poetic codices'.[50]
4. The *y* for *i* in *swylce* (lines 47, 116, 115, 135) is demonstrative of a rounding found in both the West Saxon and Mercian regions.[51]
5. Typical of Late West Saxon are the occurrences of *y* from earlier *ie* (line 43 *hyra*), and *y* for an earlier *i* (line 43 *sygebearn*; line 35 *forbȳgan*; line 96 *synne*).[52]
6. The spelling of *waldend* (line 112) as opposed to *wealdend* was not uncommon in West Saxon and found in most poetic texts.[53]
7. The interchange of *h* and *g* was typical in Late West Saxon (lines 18, 35, 38, 56, 129, 134 *burg* forms for earlier *burh*).[54]

Given the relatively short length of the poem, not many distinctively dialectal

44 See Muir (2000), p. 1, n. 1.
45 Sisam (1962), pp. 98 and 102.
46 For a list of the features throughout the Exeter Book that suggest that it was written in the West Saxon area, see Sisam (1962), pp. 102–3. See also N. F. Blake (1962), 'The Scribe of the Exeter Book', *Neophilologus* 46, 316–19; K. Brunner (1965), *Altenglische Grammatik (nach der Angelsächsischen Grammatik von E. Sievers neubearbeitet).* 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer), §22; and K. Luick (1921), p. 257, *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache.* Leipzig: Tauchnitz.
47 *hȳ* appears in *The Descent into Hell* at lines 8, 10, 16, 90 and 106. The form *hī* appears at line 12.
48 Paraphrased from Sisam (1962), p. 102. For further discussion of the development of *hī/hȳ* forms see R. M. Hogg (1992), *A Grammar of Old English. V.1: Phonology*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, §5.146n1 and §6.40.
49 Sisam (1962), p. 101.
50 Ibid., p. 102.
51 Luick (1921), p. 257. See also Hogg (1992), §5.181.
52 Brunner, *Altenglische Grammatik*, §22.
53 E. G. Stanley (1969), 'Spellings of the Waldend Group', in *Studies in Language, Literature, and Culture of the Middle Ages and Later*, ed. E. Bagby Atwood and A. A. Hill. Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 47. Also see Campbell (1959), §143.
54 Campbell (1959), §447.

forms are found. The forms evident within the text that are typical of West Saxon strongly suggest a West Saxon scribe.[55] Although *The Descent into Hell* seems in character with the rest of the Exeter Book which points to a West Saxon dialect, there are a small number of forms that may point to a non-West Saxon origin. However, the evidence does suggest that the dialect of the poem concurs with the rest of the Exeter Book and the linguistic features mentioned above suggest that it is for the most part Late West Saxon containing a small sprinkling of Early West Saxon forms.[56]

With regards to spelling, there is a number of spelling curiosities that are noted below. The noun *rēone* in line 6a is not recorded elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon verse, and as *ASPR* state 'unless we are prepared to assume a noun *rēon*, "mourning, lament", not elsewhere recorded, we must emend to *rēonge*'.[57] Various other emendations have been suggested, most notably as an adverb translated as 'bitterly', 'sadly', and also as the dative singular of the adjective *rēonig*, meaning 'sad', 'gloomy'.[58] As an adverb, according to B. Thorpe and W. Mackie, *rēone* would modify the subsequent verb *berēotan* and thus translate as 'those desolate women wished to mourn with weeping and bitterly bewail, for a while, the Prince's death'.[59] Other earlier editors like J. Cramer, *ASPR* and Muir understand *rēone* as an adjective by emending it to *rēonge* from *rēonig*.[60] This emendation may be suitable in terms of the poem's context as *rēonge* would modify the accusative singular noun *dēað* in line 5. According to Cramer, *ASPR* and Muir's suggested emendation at lines 4–6a of *The Descent into Hell* would translate as: 'those desolate women wished to mourn with weeping and to bewail, for a while, the sad death of the Prince'. However, *rēone* as the dative of *rēon* is perfectly acceptable within the line and in terms of context. When understood with the infinitive form of the verb *berēotan* that *rēone* precedes, the clause may be simply translated as 'to bewail with lamentation'. There are no other instances of *rēone* as a noun. *Rēone*'s occurrence as an adjective is sparse in Old English verse and occurs in only one other instance in the corpus of Old English poetry.[61] Considering that the adjectival forms occur infrequently in Anglo-Saxon verse, there seems an insubstantial amount of evidence to support such an emendation in *The Descent into Hell*, especially when such a change slightly alters the meaning of the line. Whereas no emendation demonstrates an emphasis on the bereavement of the women in lines 4–6a, modification of *rēone* to an adjective in turn places the emphasis on Christ's

55 This of course does not suggest that the poem was composed in the same region.

56 This approximation is strictly concerned with the text's recording in the manuscript and not to be confused with the poem's composition. For discussion of possible dating of the poem's composition see pp. 27–30 of this chapter.

57 *ASPR* III, p. 356. See Commentary on line 6a for further discussion on *rēone*. The lines in question are 4–6a, which I edit as follows: *Woldan wērigu wīf wōpe bimǣnan / æþelinges dēað āne hwīle, / rēone berēotan*.

58 These emendations are further discussed in the Commentary to line 6a.

59 Thorpe (1842), p. 459, and Mackie (1934), p. 178.

60 J. Cramer (1897) (ed.), 'Quelle, Verfasser und Text des altenglischen Gedichtes "Christi Höllenfahrt"', *Beiblatt zur Anglia* 19, 148; *ASPR* III, p. 356, and Muir (2000), p. 341.

61 According to the *DOE*, *rēonig* occurs in *Elene* at line 1083. The only variation of *rēonig* which is *rēongan* is similarly sparse in Old English verse and occurs once in *Juliana*, line 530.

death. In keeping with the poem's theme (as is discussed in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4) it seems reasonable that *rēone* is a noun which further emphasizes the women's grief and keeps the focus on their journey as well as the audience's metaphysical journey with them.[62] It might be argued that, whenever sense can be made from the text as it stands, effort should be made to preserve the original reading.

Another word that has caused similar confusion amongst editors is *blīðne*, since the choice to emend the word to *bliðe* or retain the manuscript reading leads to differing interpretations of the passage.[63] Previous emendations suggest that *blīðe* either refers to the angels (as an accusative plural) or alludes to the women (as a nominative plural). An earlier interpretation by F. Holthausen suggests *blīðne* is a noun alluding to Christ. *Blīðe* can also be used as an adverb, although retaining the form *blīðne* without emendation offers a sensible reading within the poem's context. I suggest that *blīðne*, taken as an accusative singular adjective, refers to the *beorge* which sits empty upon the arrival of the women.[64] By understanding the text in this way, the poem would read: *hæleð wæron mōdge, / þē hȳ æt þam beorge blīðne fundon*.[65] This quietness of the tomb in line 8 juxtaposes the implied noisiness that takes place upon Christ's Resurrection in lines 19–21.[66]

Because of the lacuna on fol. 121*v* it is impossible to determine the exact wording of line 122. The word *nama*, which precedes the lacuna on the leaf, is much debated.[67] For example, early emendations were suggested by F. Holthausen who first proposed emending *nama* to *naman* in order to correspond with the dative form of Mary's name (which he also suggests emending). He later suggested *naman* to support an alternate reading [*mærsu*]*man naman* in lieu of Mary's name, basing both emendations on grounds of syntax.[68] The lost words in the lacuna most likely reveal the case of *nama*, so it is impossible to know whether or not *nama* in lieu of *naman* was a scribal omission. Holthausen's emendation of *nama* is based on the assumption that his reconstruction of line 122 is accurate. However, it is too risky to make such an assumption. Muir's edition quite rightly leaves *nama* as it is and attempts to explain its presence by means of genealogical analysis. He contends that 'if there were other data to suggest a northern origin for the text, then *nama* may be taken as demonstrating loss of [the] final *n* . . . [however,] the manuscript form *nama* may

62 This is further supported by the fact that emphasis on Christ is minimal in the poem, as the poet uses words to describe Christ and His actions economically. For further discussion of the poet's representation of Christ and the purpose of minimizing His character see Ch. 3, pp. 73–4. The idea of the audience going on a metaphysical journey as they work their way through the poem is further discussed in Ch. 3.

63 See Commentary at line 7–8 for further analysis of *blīðne*.

64 F. Holthausen (1908), 'Zur Altenglischen Literatur. V', *Beiblatt zur Anglia*. 19, 49–53.

65 *The Descent into Hell*, lines 7b–8.

66 *Open wæs þæt eorðærn. Æþelinges līc / onfēng fēores gæst, folde beofode, / hlōgan helwaran*.

67 As it has survived, line 122 reads: *ond fore þīnre mē*[. . . . . .]*rian nama*. See Commentary at line 122 for further analysis of *nama* and conjectural reconstructions of the line.

68 F. Holthausen (1907), 'Zur Altenglischen Literatur IV', *Beiblatt zur Anglia* 18, 20, and (1908), p. 53.

alternatively be understood as a leveled form of *naman*.[69] Muir's suggestion is reasonable because it accounts for the word as it is. However, the possibility of scribal error of a different sort must be taken into account. At line 87, the words *under helle doru* are written over an erased area and, given the context of the phrase, it is most likely that the scribe omitted the macron sign over *doru* which would have indicated its dative, plural form.[70] In this instance, there seems enough evidence to support such an emendation, although in the case of *nama*, it is too difficult to determine whether this too is a scribal error, since too much of the line *nama* follows is missing. Without enough evidence to support a complete reconstruction of the line, it is unjustifiable to assume that *nama* in its present form is due to scribal error.[71] In many cases troublesome words analysed within the context of their respective lines and passages can occasionally indicate that the scribe was not mechanically copying the text but rather well skilled at his art.[72]

The poem contains one neologism, *end* in line 71, and one hapax legomenon *bimengdes[t]* at line 93. Although neither of them warrants the description 'poetic', analysis of each word is provided here. The *DOE* indicates that there are 18 instances of the word *end* in the corpus of Old English. Apart from the one occurrence of *end* in *The Descent into Hell*, all other instances of *end* appear in prose texts. Grein explains *end* as an adverb *ēnd*, 'olim, prius', referring to the Modern German word *ehender*.[73] Holthausen claims that *end* is a cognate of Gothic *andiz*(*-uh*), Old Norse *endr*, meaning 'formerly'.[74] F. Klaeber suggests reading *ǣne*, 'once', or *ǣrest*, a proposal reaffirmed in Mackie's translation, while Bradley employs the word 'first' in his translation.[75] Holthausen's assertion is convincing, as the word's genealogy seems to aid in understanding its context within the poem. I argue that *end* relating to ON *endr* is sound in terms of the poem's context as John addresses Christ: 'I have endured much / since you *previously* journeyed to me . . .'[76]

The *DOE* entry for *bimengdes[t]* is inconclusive and Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, offers no variations of the word. Words like *binn*, meaning 'manger', *bin* and *bim* do not offer any convincing solutions in terms of context and understanding. Alternative spellings for *engdes[t]* such as verbs

69 Muir (2000), p. 682. Muir's suggested reading is supported by Hogg (1992), §6.60 who reveals that from the ninth-century *nama* was more frequently used than its original Germanic form *naman*. See also Brunner (1965), §22.

70 See corresponding line in the Apparatus and additional comments at line 87 of the Commentary.

71 See additional conjectures of words that are lacking enough codicological and palaeographical evidence at lines 62, 90–3 in the Commentary.

72 The examples of *rēone* and *blīðne* are prime examples of seemingly difficult words that can be explained by understanding them in the context of their respective lines.

73 C. W. M. Grein (1857), *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie 1*. Göttingen: Georg H. Wigand, p. 193.

74 Holthausen (1907), p. 201. Holthausen's theory is supported by E. A. Kock (1918), *Jubilee Jaunts and Jottings: 250 Contributions to the Interpretation and Prosody of Old West Teutonic Alliterative Poetry*. Lund: Lund Universitets Årsskrift 14.26, pp. 1–82, at p. 52, *ASPR* III, p. 358, and Muir (2000), p. 680.

75 F. Klaeber (1904), 'Emendations in Old English Poems', *Modern Philology* 2, 141. See also Mackie (1934), p. 176, and Bradley (1982), p. 393.

76 Translation of *The Descent into Hell*, lines 70b–71.

like *anga*, *engan* and *engu* seem improbable in terms of contextualization and general sense. Likewise, alternative conjectures like *þu, hu* or *bu* followed by *neng-, nengdes-* or *nengdest* whose closest relative is in Old Saxon conflict with the general sense and context of the passage.

With the general consensus of the Exeter Book's composition being around the late tenth century and the location of the codex being of West Saxon origin, it can be stated with reasonable certainty, as will be shown in the next section, that *The Descent into Hell* was composed in the last years of the ninth century or in, at least, the first quarter of the tenth century.[77] There is evidence to support this dating, for example by the presence of the *bi*-form of verbal prefixes, a feature which is present in the poem which 'occurs sporadically in late texts, [and was] usual in the *Vespasian Psalter Gloss*, which was written in Canterbury *c.* 870'.[78] The language of the text thus indicates when the poem was recorded, and in this case, analysis of the poem's subject matter can also help determine an approximation for the poem's composition. Since the poem is an overtly Christian text and the poem's content is a literary expression of a theme central to Christianity, it evidently was produced when religious roots had been firmly established. The poet's use of Germanic imagery and allusions are limited and are ornamental rather than providing support to the poem's central theme. Thus, the poem most likely was composed during a period when fashioning verse in the same vein as traditional Germanic poetry and drawing on heroic language, style and imagery was not necessary for its Anglo-Saxon audience.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE OF COMPOSITION

Previous attempts to determine the author of the poem have failed, especially in the case of the theory that Cynewulf was the author and that the surviving text is merely a fragmentary piece of a longer narrative.[79] J. Kirkland argues

77 The poem's composition is discussed further in the following section.

78 I. L. Gordon (ed.) (1960), *The Seafarer*. London: Methuen & Co., p. 28. Examples in *The Descent into Hell* are found at lines 4 and 93.

79 See J. Kirkland (1885), *A Study of the Anglo-Saxon Poem, the 'Harrowing of Hell'*. Halle: BiblioLife, LLC, pp. 6 ff. Kirkland provides the most extensive study on Cynewulf's authorship of the poem, forming his entire argument on the assumption that Cynewulf was the poet of *The Descent into Hell*, thus analysing the text around this theory. Ultimately, Kirkland fails to convincingly demonstrate that Cynewulf composed the poem contained on fols. 119*r*–121*v* of the Exeter Book, since his evidence is insubstantial. He merely shows that some words were in habitual use by Cynewulf, but the majority of the words were found elsewhere in Old English. See also W. H. Hulme (1907), *The Middle English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*. EETS ES 100. London: Oxford University Press. Hulme matter-of-factly claims that the poem is a Cynewulfian fragment or at least a fragmentary piece composed by one of his school of poets (p. lxviii). Other earlier discussion of Cynewulf's possible authorship of *The Descent into Hell* include: A. S. Cook (1900, repr. 1964) (ed.), *The Christ of Cynewulf: A Poem in Three Parts, the Advent, the Ascension, and the Last Judgement*, 2nd ed. Boston: Ginn & Co. pp. 129–30; Cramer (1897), pp. 141–7; S. A. Brooke (1892), *The History of Early English Literature*. London: Macmillan, pp. 425–6; R. P. von Wülker (1885, repr. 1999), *Grundriss zur Geschichte der angelsächsischen Litteratur*. Leipzig: Verlag von Veit & Co., p. 187; C. W. M. Grein (1880), *Kurzgefasste angelsächsische Grammatik*. Kassel: G. H. Wigand; and B. ten Brink (1877),

that 'Little can be gathered for Cynewulf's authorship out of the style, yet nothing can be adduced that argues against it . . . [and although] the same rhetorical figures or other peculiarities of poetical diction as are frequent in [Cynewulf's genuine works] may also be found in [*The Descent into Hell* poem], ... they are, for the most part, the common possession of all the Anglo-Saxon poets, but little proof is thereby gained for Cynewulf.'[80] Krapp and Dobbie, however, emphasize that despite the 'many verbal and stylistic reminiscences of Cynewulf, the lyric form and the independence of written sources indicate quite clearly that Cynewulf was not the author'.[81] Nothing in the poem suggests that it is fragmentary and the claim that Cynewulf produced the poem is unverifiable since the poem's liturgical style and innovative treatment of the subject of baptism leaves it without strong evidence that Cynewulf, himself, composed the poem. Nevertheless, the poem does seem to belong to the poetry typical within the 'Cynewulfian tradition', especially due to its overtly Christian subject matter and its eloquent treatment of the main theme.[82] By 'Cynewulfian tradition' I mean someone from Cynewulf's school of poetry who borrowed and applied poetic techniques typical of Cynewulf's own poetry. Some of these techniques include: composition of the poetry which was more personal in tone, the use of lyrical outbursts and the integration of foreign literary influences into the Old English poetry. There is nothing in the text to suggest heathen beliefs were still prominent and any Germanic elements within the text are used to illustrate an overriding Christian message of salvation. An example of this is evident in the word *meotude* (line 137), which according to Bosworth and Toller was used in earlier Old English poetry to mean 'fate', 'destiny' or 'death'.[83] However, in *The Descent into Hell*, *meotud* has fully assumed an association with the Christian God as the closing half-line concludes with an expression of thanks to Him.[84] The overtly religious theme

Geschichte der Englischen Litteratur. Berlin: Vlg. R. Oppenheim, p. 71. No other attempt to identify another author other than Cynewulf has been implemented by previous scholars. Given the sparse evidence of the poem's composition it is unlikely that a poet's identity can be determined; however, the style of the poem certainly points to someone working within the Cynewulfian tradition.

80 Kirkland (1885), p. 32.

81 *ASPR* III, p. lxiii. The view that Cynewulf is not the author in view of insubstantial evidence to support such a claim is the accepted scholarly position today.

82 Select reading of sources on the Cynewulfian style of poetry include: E. R. Anderson (1983), *Cynewulf, Structure, Style and Theme in His Poetry*. London: Associated University Presses; A. Orchard (2003), 'Both Style and Substance: the Case for Cynewulf', in *Anglo-Saxon Styles*, ed. C. E. Karkov and G. H. Brown. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 271–305; A. H. Olsen (1984), *Speech, Song, and Poetic Craft: the Artistry of the Cynewulf Canon*. New York: P. Lang; and K. Sisam (1962), 'Cynewulf and his Poetry', in his *Studies in the History of Old English Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 1–29.

83 J. Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1898).

84 The final half-line of the poem states: *sīe þæs symle meotude þonc!* Although *metod* occurred quite frequently in Christian poetry, Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, claim that the word also functioned as an epithet of a deity, and is cognate with Old Saxon *metod* and Norse *mjǫtuðr*. Some examples of *meotud* referring to the Christian God can be found at *Christ I–III*, lines 289, 876, 1077, 1365, 1559, 1579; *Andreas*, lines 918, 981, 1469, *Guthlac*, line 358, *Phoenix*, lines 443, 660, *Azarias*, lines 5, 86, 146, 154; *The Order of the World*, line 98; *Juliana*, lines 182, 306, 436, 667, 721; *Gifts of Men*, line 4; *Precepts*, lines 4, 18; *Judgment Day I*, line 65; and *Resignation*, lines

and biblical narrative seem to suggest that the poet and his audience were familiar with Christian concepts of baptism, redemption and salvation and the poet exercises a unique approach to his expression of Christ's Descent. The intricate use of typological references and complex liturgical-like structure suggest that the poem was composed for an audience whose poet, at the very least, was familiar with the liturgical rituals and Easter imagery that hold the poem's narrative together.

Following decades of political upheaval and Viking raids, English monasticism and the state of learning in England was in turmoil by the early tenth century.[85] Alfred's campaign sought to improve the state of learning through monastic and ecclesiastical reform. It is no surprise that this reintroduction of faith would spur the production of texts deeply connected with religious contemplation. Further still, 'by the tenth century the story of Christ's Descent into Hades had permeated all Christian literature and art',[86] so the idea of the poet borrowing from the *descensus* tradition and creating a unique narrative seems plausible, since direct sources for the poem are lacking.[87] Is it possible that the poet might have originally been from elsewhere, migrating to England from Continental Europe during Alfred's Benedictine reform, bringing with him a different version of the *descensus* and, borrowing from his own tradition? The answer seems to be, quite simply, no, since there are no versions of the *descensus* that are similar to this text and there is no evidence to suggest one way or another whether the poet was originally English.[88] The poem may very well have been written during the decades after Cynewulf's death when the traditions were most actively flourishing.[89] With the awareness that the poem belongs to the Cynewulfian tradition and knowing with confidence a

51, 91. For the earlier meaning of the word see *Beowulf*, lines 110, 169, 706, 967, 979, 1057, 1611, 2527; *The Riming Poem*, line 86, *The Seafarer*, line 116; and *The Wanderer*, line 2. The *DOE* was used as a guide to identify instances of *meotud*, although I was able to determine whether each instance was referring to either the Christian God or its earlier meaning by examining each word within the context of each poem. I acknowledge that examining each use of *meotud* in this way still relies on interpretations of each poem; however, general scholarly consensus of interpretations was considered as well as each poem's respective date of composition. All line numbers correspond with *ASPR* and B. Mitchell and F. Robinson (eds.) (1998), *Beowulf. An Edition*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

85 For detailed discussion of the Viking raids of the ninth century and the subsequent monastic reform of the tenth century see F. Stenton (1971. repr. 2001), *Anglo-Saxon England*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 433–6, 442–8 and 455–7; and E. G. Stanley (1975), *The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also Ch. 3, n. 106.

86 Hulme (1907), p. lxiv.

87 The popularity of the *descensus* among Christians is discussed in detail in Ch. 2, pp. 45–50.

88 See G. Crotty (1939), 'The Exeter Harrowing of Hell: A Reinterpretation', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 54, 355. Although Crotty does identify a fourth-century Syrian homily as a possible source for the passage referring to John's armour in the poem, there is no other evidence that the narrative is acquired from a direct source on Continental Europe.

89 In keeping with scholarly consensus concerning Cynewulf's dates, I maintain that the majority of the works ascribed to Cynewulf, as proposed by R. Fulk (1992), *A History of Old English Meter*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 351–68, were written in the early ninth century. See also D. C. Calder (1981), *Cynewulf*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, pp. 15–18; and D. C. Calder and S. Greenfield (1986), *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 164–5.

compilation date for the Exeter Book it is most likely that the poem's composition can be designated a date close to Cynewulf's time, perhaps in the final decades of the ninth or possibly the beginning of the tenth century.

2

The *Descensus* Motif

The concept of Christ's Descent into the Underworld was moulded into the framework of Christian teaching and thought early in ecclesiastical history. Although the doctrine of the *descensus* seems to have always been a complicated concept, it can be said that by the Anglo-Saxon period the *descensus* had not only secured its position into Christian doctrine, but had etched its way into the popular imagination, commonly depicted in art, poetry, sermons and even drama. A brief analysis of the origins of this belief will aid our understanding of its significance in popular Anglo-Saxon consciousness.[1]

WHERE DID THE IDEA OF THE *DESCENSUS* ORIGINATE?

Although many scholars and theologians claim that there is very little evidence in the Bible regarding the *descensus*, there are a number of allusions scattered throughout scripture, and one interpretation in particular which has emerged with probability as a direct reference to the *descensus*.[2] In his epistle to the Ephesians, St Paul writes:

1 For selected studies on the *descensus* in art see T. Borenius and E. W. Tristram (1929, repr. 1976), *English Medieval Painting*. New York: Hacker Art Books; G. Schiller (1971–2), *Iconography of Christian Art*, trans. J. Seligman, 2 vols. Greenwich: New York Graphic Society; O. E. Saunders (1969), *English Illumination*, 2 vols. New York: Hacker Art Books. In drama see H. S. Anderson and L. Lieblein (1988), 'Staging Symbolic Action in the Medieval Cycle Drama: The York/Towneley Harrowing of Hell', *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 13, 211–20; M. D. Anderson (1963), *Drama and Imagery in the English Medieval Churches*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; E. K. Chambers (1903, repr. 1967), *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press; K. Young (1933), *The Drama of the Medieval Church*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, vol. 1, pp. 149–77; C. Hardin (1955), *English Religious Drama in the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; O. B. Hardison (1965), *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. In liturgy see J. Daniélou (1956), *The Bible and the Liturgy*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press; D. N. Dumville (1972), 'Liturgical Drama and Panegyric Responsory from the Eighth Century? A Re-examination of the Origin and Contents of the Ninth-Century Section of the *Book of Cerne*', *Journal of Theological Studies* 23.2, 374–406.

2 The latter half of the twentieth century has proved fruitful regarding scholarly debate in relation to the doctrine of the *descensus*. For a survey of modern scholarly interpretations of Christ's Descent see W. H. Harris (1996), *The Descent of Christ. Ephesians 4: 7–11 and Traditional Hebrew Imagery*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, pp. 12–32. Most New Testament references to Christ's Descent are generally incidental, and serve to highlight more specific ideas within each writer's message; nevertheless, there was a general belief in the tradition of the *descensus* from the first century onwards. See Appendix 1 for a list of references to the *descensus* by patristic commentators throughout the first millennium.

> Unicuique autem nostrum data est gratia secundum mensuram donationis Christi. Propter quod dicit ascendens in altum captivam duxit captivitatem dedit dona hominibus. Quod autem ascendit quid est nisi quia et descendit primum in inferiores partes terrae. Qui descendit ipse est et qui ascendit super omnes caelos ut impleret omnia. Et ipse dedit quosdam quidem apostolos quosdam autem prophetas alios vero evangelistas alios autem pastores et doctores.[3]

Although St Paul's writings are heavily layered in meaning, brief passages on their own very often carried implications of being dogmatic within early Christian communities. From this passage in Ephesians, then, it seems that St Paul is not only illustrating within a greater context that after Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, He left spiritual gifts to men, but on a more literal level the Apostle suggests that Christ made an actual 'descent' and journey into Hell.[4] While the idea of the *descensus* is never fully developed in St Paul's own writings, there seems to have been a natural acceptance of the concept by early believers.[5]

A common method of confirming Christ as the Messiah involved referring to events and prophecies within Old Testament scripture as foreshadowing Christ and his works, and undoubtedly for this reason, St Paul and later writers reflected on parallels from the Old Testament which were symbolic

[3] Eph. 4: 7–11. 'But to every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the giving of Christ. Wherefore he saith: Ascending on high, he led captivity captive; he gave gifts to men. Now that he ascended, what is it, but because he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and other some evangelists, and other some pastors and doctors'. Unless otherwise stated all biblical passages are taken from *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, with translations from the Douay-Rheims version.

[4] According to Harris (1996), p. xv, St Paul is also making the assertion that Christ's Descent is typologically connected to Moses' descent from Mount Sinai. Since Moses descended and delivered the Torah to the Israelites after ascending Mount Sinai, so too, it was necessary for Christ to descend into Hell and distribute spiritual gifts to His Church. See Eph. 4: 9–10, which reads: 'Quod autem ascendit quid est nisi quia et descendit primum in inferiores partes terrae. Qui descendit ipse est et qui ascendit super omnes caelos ut impleret omnia'. See n. 3 of this chapter for translation.

[5] See other Pauline references to Christ's Descent in Acts 2: 27; Rom. 10: 6–8; Phil. 2: 9–11; Col. 2: 15; I Cor. 15: 55. Petrine sources that include *descensus* imagery include: I Pet. 3: 18–22, 4: 6. Like the passage in Ephesians, this passage in I Pet. 3: 18–22 was at the forefront of scriptural exegesis relating to the *descensus*. The passage reads: 'quia et Christus semel pro peccatis mortuus est iustus pro iniustis ut nos offerret Deo mortificatus carne vivificatus autem spiritu in quo et his qui in carcere erant spiritibus veniens praedicavit qui increduli fuerant aliquando quando expectabat Dei patientia in diebus Noe cum fabricaretur arca in qua pauci id est octo animae salvae factae sunt per aquam quod et vos nunc similis formae salvos facit baptisma non carnis depositio sordium sed conscientiae bonae interrogatio in Deum per resurrectionem Iesu Christi qui est in dextera Dei profectus in caelum subiectis sibi angelis et potestatibus et virtutibus.' ('Because Christ also died once for our sins, the just for the unjust: that he might offer us to God, being put to death indeed in the flesh, but enlivened in the spirit, In which also coming he preached to those spirits that were in prison: Which had been some time incredulous, when they waited for the patience of God in the days of Noe, when the ark was a building: wherein a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. Whereunto baptism being of the like form, now saveth you also: not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the examination of a good conscience towards God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Who is on the right hand of God, swallowing down death, that we might be made heirs of life everlasting: being gone into heaven, the angels and powers and virtues being made subject to him.') Other references within the New Testament that were interpreted by patristic commentators to support the *descensus* include Matt. 12: 40, 27: 52–3; Luke 8: 31; John 3: 13, 5: 25; Heb. 2: 14; Rev. 1: 18, 9: 11, 20: 1–2.

of the *descensus* and the doctrine of Christ's Resurrection.[6] It is possible then that St Paul's readers were linked together with a common understanding, presupposing the concept of the *descensus* within the earlier Jewish framework of eschatology. Beyond the Jewish framework, comparative study of religions suggests that the descent myth was common in ethnic religions of the primitive world, yet 'the only descent myths that could have in any way exerted any formative or even colouring influences upon the Christian *descensus* are those of Semitic, Egyptian, or Hellenic origin'.[7] Because this study is concerned with the Christian *descensus* and more importantly its influence on the Exeter Book poem *The Descent into Hell*, it would be unwarranted to examine parallel primitive *descensus* myths in great detail and length. However, looking at the *descensus* within the Jewish framework is necessary in order to understand how the myth took form within Christian doctrine.

Despite the rather vague references to the *descensus* in the New Testament, the concept spread quite rapidly throughout early Christendom. The relatively simple idea of Christ descending to the Underworld some time after His Crucifixion expanded into an elaborate narrative depicting Christ, as a warrior, descending to the Underworld to defeat Satan while freeing the saints who had been held captive by death. Opportunity arose for the *descensus* story to be embellished, since an orthodox view had yet to be established.[8] As W. D. White emphasizes:

> Believing that any Christian enlightened by the Spirit could credibly enrich a narrative of the past, early story-tellers attempted to supply something that they felt was lacking in the picture of Jesus. They considered it a real service to add to the simplicity of the gospel's portrait the splendor which the ancient world considered due to a god or hero. With great subtlety and imaginative ingenuity they answered the taunts of unbelievers and covered up those characteristics of Christ which made him a stumbling block to the Jews and an offence to the Greeks.[9]

6 The following instances in the Old Testament sufficiently illustrate references to the Descent: Gen. 42: 38; Deut. 30: 12–13; Ps. 16: 10, 24: 7–10, 27: 1, 54: 16, 68: 18–19, 88, 103: 17, 139: 15; Isa. 26: 19, 42: 7, 45: 2, 53: 8–9; Ez. 26: 20; Hos. 6: 1–2, 13: 14; Zech. 9: 11. See Appendix 2 for a complete list of scriptural references to the Descent.

7 W. C. Finch (1940), 'The Descent into Hades: An Exegetical, Historical and Theological Study'. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Drew University, p. 5. For an extensive treatment of the 'descent' legend in the primitive world and in ethnic religions see J. A. MacCulloch (1930), *The Harrowing of Hell, A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Chs. I–IV, pp. 1–45; and D. F. Stewart (1903), *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.

8 For a more in-depth discussion on the *descensus* motif's appeal see pp. 50–2 of this current chapter. I am not suggesting that since the story of the Harrowing had not yet been fully developed early believers used that opportunity to aggrandize a fictitious story. Rather, I am simply highlighting the fact that since the *descensus* did not yet have an ecclesiastical endorsement with an established and clearly defined doctrine concerning all details involved in Christ's Descent, there was greater possibility for exploring the intricate details and specifics of the *descensus* in order to discuss and resolve problematic technicalities confronting patristic commentators.

9 W. D. White (1959), 'The Descent of Christ into Hell: A Study in Old English Literature'. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Texas, pp. 35–6. What White refers to as a 'stumbling block to the Jews and an offence to the Greeks' is an allusion to St Paul's message to the Corinthians. The Apostle states, I Cor. 1: 22–3: 'quoniam et Iudaei signa petunt et Graeci sapientiam quaerunt nos autem praedicamus Christum crucifixum Iudaeis quidem scandalum gentibus autem stultitiam.' ('For both the Jews require signs, and the Greeks seek after

Any prospect of negating criticism from unbelievers on a number of issues relating to Christ's death and Resurrection would have had obvious appeal to early believers, so a limited, yet genuine, number of scriptural passages combined, became the basis for the *descensus* motif.[10]

Various patristic commentators having established the basis of the story from a number of albeit vague references in the Bible, many apocryphal writings directly relating to the *descensus* developed within the first four to five centuries after Christ's death. Although many early writings relating to Christ's Descent have come down to us in name alone or through passing references, a collection of more substantial apocryphal texts has survived to the present day with little damage or alteration.[11] Of these surviving texts, R. Harris and A. Mingana emphasize that there is enough evidence to date at least one of the earliest apocryphal writings referring to the *descensus* with some certainty.[12] The *Odes of Solomon*, written some time in the last quarter of the first century, provide evidence that the story of Christ's Descent was receiving literary attention in the formative years of Christianity.[13] Although it should be noted that most of the odes make indirect references to the *descensus*, there are a number of odes that deal specifically with the Descent. *Ode 42*, in particular, deals directly with Christ's Descent. Christ, as the assumed speaker, declares:

> Sheol saw me and was shattered,
> And Death ejected me and many with me
> I have been vinegar and bitterness to it,
> And I went down with it as far as its depth.
> Then the feet and the head it released,
> Because it was not able to endure my face.
> And I made a congregation of living among his dead;
> And I spoke with them by living lips;
> In order that my word may not be unprofitable.
> And those who had died ran towards me;
> And they cried out and said, Son of God, have pity on us.
> And dead with us according to Thy kindness,
> And bring us out from the bonds of darkness.
> And open for us the door

wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumblingblock, and unto the Gentiles foolishness.') For an in-depth analysis of attempts within an apocryphal text to eliminate offensive representations of Christ within the four Gospels see O. Borchert (1933, repr. 2004), *The Original Jesus*. London: Lutterworth Press.

10 See nn. 5–6 of this chapter for some scriptural references and Appendix 2 for a complete list.

11 Among these texts are the *Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, *Gospel of Nicodemus*, *Acts of Thomas*, *Epistle of the Apostles*, *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Gospel of Bartholomew*. For selected commentary and translations on these texts see R. Harris and A. Mingana (eds.) (1920), *The Odes of Solomon*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; J. H. Charlesworth (ed.) (1977), *The Odes of Solomon*. Missoula: Scholar Press; M. Lattke (ed.) (2009), *Odes of Solomon*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press; H. C. Kim (ed.) (1973), the *Gospel of Nicodemus*: *Gesta Salvatoris: Edited from the Codex Einsidlensis, Einsiedeln Stiftsbibliothek MS 326 /.* Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies; A. F. J. Klijn (ed.) (2003), *Acts of Thomas*. Leiden: E. J. Brill; the *Epistle of the Apostles*; R. H. Charles (ed.) (1918), *Ascension of Isaiah*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; F. Scheidweiler (1963), 'The Gospel of Bartholomew', in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. W. Schneemelcher. London: SCM Press, pp. 486–503.

12 Paraphrased from Harris and Mingana (1920), p. 62.

13 Ibid., p. 69.

By which we may come out to Thee;
For we perceive that our death does not touch Thee.
May we also be saved with Thee,
Because Thou art our Saviour.
Then I heard their voice,
And placed their faith in my heart.
And I placed my name upon their head,
Because they are free and they are mine.[14]

The ode fuses together Jewish eschatological views of Sheol with the Christian concept of Hell, all the while emphasizing Christ as a redeemer, defeating death and freeing those bound in the Underworld with 'bonds of darkness'.[15] The somewhat ambiguous description of Christ's Enemy who is 'unable to endure [the Saviour's] face' gives heed to the possibility that darkness so inherently encircles the shadowy, evil being, so much so, that the level of wickedness, itself, reduces the likelihood of a physical confrontation. Simply put, the light that the Saviour brings to Sheol is frankly too intense for the shadowy, dark, Enemy to bear. This juxtaposition of light and darkness and more specifically, Christ's light piercing the darkness and gloom of Hell became a common feature in the *descensus* stories and was, no doubt, a familiar concept for the Anglo-Saxon poet who composed the Exeter Book poem.[16]

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF THE UNDERWORLD

Within the Jewish tradition, Sheol was the term used in reference to the Underworld where the dead met their final fate. One of the Psalmists poignantly describes the grim existence that awaits him as his 'vita mea ad infernum descendit',[17] and he foresees the dark world beyond the grave as a place where God's wonders and love are unknown.[18] Early in the Jewish tradition, Sheol, void of character, reward or punishment, was simply the final destination of generations of persons whose earthly time had expired and who would remain 'beyond the scepter of God . . . [lying] in the sad empire of death'.[19]

Although there is not enough evidence to suggest that within the Hebrew language the term Sheol held any sense other than meaning *grave*, Old Testament scholars, patristic commentators and theologians developed three different renderings of the word, that being *grave*, *pit* and *Hell*, to foster understanding and interpretation of specific biblical passages.[20] Gradually,

14 Charlesworth (1977), pp. 145–6.
15 For further information concerning the concept of *Sheol* see n. 20 of this chapter.
16 For more detailed discussion on this subject see Ch. 3, pp. 55–6, 85–8, 90–1, Ch. 4, pp. 106–7, 127, 133 and Commentary on line 53, p. 167.
17 Ps. 87: 4. Literally, 'life descends towards the lower regions'. In the Hebrew text the word *sheol* is used.
18 See Ps. 87: 4–13.
19 A. Metcalf (1901), 'The Evolution of the Belief in the World beyond the Grave', *The Biblical World* 17.5, 339.
20 For further discussion on the linguistic and historical nature of *Sheol* see A. Hovey (1885),

within the Hebrew tradition the notion of Jehovah's governance over the Underworld took shape, and with it, hope also became a prominent feature. As A. Metcalf states 'the way was open for the conception that Jehovah would care for his own even in the land of death'.[21] The centuries following the Exile became a turning point in the first millennium of Jewish history for many reasons and with a collective desire to be free and return to the Promised Land came new responses to and perspectives on life and death, thus giving an opportunity to elaborate on earlier visions of the Underworld.

Over several centuries the primitive concept of Sheol developed. Metcalf claims that there are 'numerous Old Testament passages which bewail the mystery in which all human life apparently ends at the one dismal goal, without distinction of character or career'.[22] The evolving Jewish Underworld was reflecting concerns about the afterlife. The concept of Sheol was fraught with uncertainties that necessitated further development because it seemed unreasonable for a soul's final destination to end up in Sheol whether that soul derived from an evil person or a good one. Eventually, a solution came in the form of Gehenna, and the distinction between where the righteous and wicked would spend their afterlife was clearly made.[23] Despite the evolution of Sheol from a crude, primordial place to a more complex location with distinguishable features from Gehenna, it remained a relatively impersonal location where the deceased would linger eternally. However, further development of Sheol came in the form of the post-Exilic belief in a Messiah that would restore the Jewish nation.[24] As Metcalf suggests:

> The Resurrection of the dead and the doctrine of rewards and punishments were the fruit of the Exile. When the nation was scattered and dead, the persistent doctrine of the coming Messiah led logically to the doctrine of the resurrected

'The Meaning of *Sheol* in the Old Testament', *The Old Testament Student* 5. 2, 49–52; and Hovey (1917), 'The Original Meaning of Sheol', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 36.3/4, 258. The different translations of the word *Sheol* carry distinct characteristics that are applicable to interpreting specific biblical passages. The *grave* is connected with the death of good men whose righteousness prevents them from meeting a cruel end in a horrific location. The *pit*, on the other hand, involves the idea of a physical descent or a descent of significant depth. With regards to the term Hell, although there is no indication of *Sheol* referring to Hell in the Old Testament, it is understood to be the abode of wicked men and is closely connected with the New Testament teachings on evil men's suffering in the afterlife. Furthermore, the Septuagint usually translates *Sheol* as *Hades*, the common Greek term for the Underworld. Beginning in the first century BC, late Judaism defines a fiery place of torment for the wicked as *Gehenna*. The Greek term *Hades* crossed over into the Christian vocabulary, but *Gehenna* remained the defining place in which the keenly curious satisfied their enquiry about a place of torment in the afterlife within the Jewish tradition. According to Hovey (1885), when one of the three terms was unsuitable insofar as translating and interpreting biblical passages was concerned, the word *Sheol* was left unchanged and simply meant 'the place of burial' (p. 51). As for the Greek *τὰ κατώτατα*, meaning 'the lowest', and the Latin *inferi*, that is 'those below', both terms may also be translated as *underworld*, *netherworld* or *abode of the dead*.

21 Metcalf (1901), p. 340.

22 Ibid., p. 341.

23 See n. 20 above for an explanation of *Gehenna*, the second compartment of *Sheol*.

24 One of the earliest Messianic references comes from Psalm 15: 10 in which the Psalmist exclaims that God 'non enim derelinques animam meam in inferno nec dabis sanctum tuum videre corruptionem' ('Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; nor wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption').

> nation . . . The nation's messianic paradise led naturally and ultimately to the conception of the Resurrection of the individual from the ledges of Sheol. Until the Exile the individual had been lost in the nation. When the nation was dead the individual was left, and faith built up a new faith about his future.[25]

In ancient history, the fate of the individual was often subordinate to that of the tribe and that is true within the ancient Jewish social framework as well. Metcalf argues that 'the continuity of the individual was hazy and almost impossible',[26] yet the transition was made from emphasizing national faith to an individual connection with God and the survival of the soul through Christ's Advent, death and Resurrection. There was a major cultural and spiritual shift in the inter-testamental books from a religion of the tribe/people to one of the individual.[27] The evolution of the afterlife from Sheol to the Christian Hell developed well over a millennium; however, the growing recognition of Hell was followed gradually by the increasing importance of the salvation of the individual.

As with the obstacles facing the Jewish nation that attempted to realize the particulars of life after death, so too early Christians, who adopted the central concept of the Jewish Underworld, met a similar obstacle in explaining how the Jewish Patriarchs would never partake in the apocalyptic Resurrection if they were forever held in an albeit superior section of Sheol. For early Christians, the limitations within Jewish eschatology and the incompleteness of Sheol afforded the opportunity to use the *descensus* myth to concentrate both on the 'continuity of the individual'[28] and on the fate of an individual sinner's soul after death.[29] Christ's Descent and Resurrection not only illustrated life's supremacy over death, and provided an escape for the righteous who had been bound in the Underworld, the *descensus* myth specifically held a more practical function within Christian teaching.[30] The fate of the world within Judaeo-Christian history was written in one stroke after one fateful bite of a tantalizing, yet, forbidden fruit.[31] Sin had entered the world in the early days

25 Metcalf (1901), p. 342.

26 Ibid. (345).

27 The inter-testamental books or the biblical apocrypha include Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Additions to Daniel, Prayer of Manasseh and Maccabees I and II. See the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1912) for more information on these apocryphal texts.

28 Metcalf (1901), p. 345.

29 For a more detailed introduction to the Jewish concept of the spirit and soul and death see Finch (1940), pp. 6–9.

30 Later developments in Christian doctrine gave rise to the idea of Limbo, the temporary state inhabited by followers of God who had died before Christ's redemption made it possible to enter Heaven, and also Limbus Patrum, which was coined in the Middle Ages in reference to the area of Hell where the Old Testament Patriarchs resided until Christ's death and Descent. For discussion on Limbo and Limbus Patrum see G. Cross (1912), 'The Mediaeval Catholic Doctrine of the Future Life', *The Biblical World* 39, 188–99; and G. P. Dwyer (1952), *Purgatory*. London: Catholic Truth Society. See also J. Le Goff (1984), *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. A. Goldhammer. London: Scholar Press; and J. Cain (2002), 'On the Problem of Hell', *Religious Studies* 38. 3, 355–62.

31 Gen. 3: 6 states: 'Vidit igitur mulier quod bonum esset lignum ad vescendum et pulchrum oculis aspectuque delectabile et tulit de fructu illius et comedit deditque viro suo qui comedit.' ('And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to

of human life, and because all mankind would be inevitably sinful ever after, with sin itself only leading to death, Christ and his Descent provided a perfect escape not only from the old law, but from the clutches of Death. The idea of there existing no hope for the soul and no possibility of redemption from the Underworld under the Hebrew tradition left a lacuna which the Christian *descensus* myth filled. Now, the Messiah could redeem all sinners who repented and free them from the Enemy's domain. Perhaps *The Descent into Hell*-poet might not have been familiar with the particulars within the Hebrew tradition of the Underworld. However, the development and evolution of the Christian Hell itself are important to consider since the Anglo-Saxon poet definitely worked with an understanding of the Christian framework of Hell.

A SUMMARY OF FIVE CENTURIES OF PATRISTIC COMMENTARY AND THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION CONCERNING THE *DESCENSUS*

As the narrative of Christ's Descent flourished in Christian communities and thrived in apocryphal literature like the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the secondary doctrine pertaining to the *descensus* was ready for systematic theological investigation and held enough significance to warrant its attention by patristic writers.[32] Coinciding with the story's growing popularity within apocryphal and extra-canonical texts was much vigorous discussion from patristic commentators who soon determined an orthodox account of the motif.

The earliest reference to the Descent in patristic commentary is recorded in Ignatius of Antioch's *Epistola ad Trallionos* somewhere near the end of the first or beginning of the second century. Ignatius writes against heretics who claimed that Christ simply appeared to die rather than to have actually died. Ignatius argues that the Saviour

> Igitur . . . qui et vere crucifixus est et mortuus est, aspicientibus caelestibus et terrestribus et infernalibus: qui et vere resurrexit a mortuis, resuscitant ipsum Patre ipsius: qui et secundum similitudinem nos credentes ipsi sic resuscitante ipsum Pater ipsius : qui et secundum similitudinem nos credentes ipsi sic resuscitabit Pater ipsius in Christo Jesu, sine quo verum vivere non habemus.[33]

Ignatius goes beyond claiming that Christ died, the commentator states rather unassumingly that Christ descended into Hell. Evident in Ignatius'

behold: and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband who did eat.')

[32] See pp. 47–50 of this chapter for further details on the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, and Ch. 4 for a comparative analysis of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and *John the Baptist's Prayer*.

[33] Ignatius. *Epistola ad Trallionos*. IX, col. 682 in *PG* 5. 'Really, and not merely in appearance was crucified and died, in the sight of beings in Heaven and on earth and under the earth'. Translation from *ANCL* 1, p. 70. Although the text in *PG* ends abruptly in the line stated above, *ANCL* had access to the longer version of Ignatius' letter which reads: 'and by those under the earth, the multitude that arose along with the Lord. For says the Scripture, 'many bodies of the saints that slept arose', their graves opened'. He descended, indeed, into Hell alone, but He arose accompanied by a multitude and tore asunder that means of separation which had existed from the beginning of the world, and cast down the partition wall' (v. 1, p. 70).

discourse is the indication that there was a somewhat common belief that Christ descended to Hell, since he mentions it so casually. However, it is clear that Ignatius' declaration of the *descensus* is not the main feature of the argument, and his point is made almost parenthetically in reference to proving the position that Christ actually died. From the commentator's claim, it is evident quite early in Post-Apostolic writings that references to Christ's Descent are linked to His Crucifixion and death, and although Ignatius' position hardly goes beyond a simple declaration that Christ descended into Hell, the fact that the claim is made by any means suggests that even at this relatively early stage in Christian history, the *descensus* motif was becoming a well-known and established belief.[34] The purpose and reasons for the Descent are not fully developed in Ignatius's claim, yet within less than half a century controversy surrounding the *descensus* reveals that the narrative had 'assumed something of an orthodox form and interpretation'.[35]

The basic elements comprising the story of Christ's Descent can come across as deceivingly straightforward and simple, yet interpreting canonical references to the *descensus* and developing an orthodox view on this doctrine was a complex task for patristic writers. Not satisfied with simply believing that Christ descended into Hell, questions such as: Where did Christ descend? On what day did He descend? What did He do when He descended? What and who exactly did He descend for? soon followed. Apart from the story's general appeal, these questions were amongst a number of complexities to consider and resolve, demanding critical attention from early Christian theologians.[36]

During the first half of the second century, the Gnostic Marcion of Pontus claimed that in the course of Christ's Descent, He rescued evil and pagan men.[37] Marcion's position was vehemently condemned by St Irenaeus, who argued that

> Super blasphemiam autem quae est in Deum, adjecit et hoc, vere diabolic os accipiens, et omnia contraria dicens veritati: Cain, et eos qui similes sunt ei, et Sodomitas, et Aegyptios, et similes eis, et omnes omnino gentes, quae in omni permistione malignitatis ambulaverunt, salvatas esse a Domino cum descendisset ad inferos, et accurrissent ei, et in suum assumpsisse regnum: Abel autem, et Enoch, et Noe, et reliquos justos, et eos qui sun erga Abraham patriarcham,

34 Ignatius repeats his claim in several other letters, thus giving indication that the story of Christ's Descent was familiar and evidently a point of discussion in early Christian circles. See also Ignatius, *Epistola ad Philadephenses*, cap. 5 and 9, in *PG* 5 and *ANCL* 1, p. 230, for a translation. See also Ignatius, *Epistola ad Magnesios*, cap. 9, in *PG* 5 and *ANCL* 1, p. 181.

35 White (1959), p. 44.

36 It should be noted that commentary on the *descensus* is still an on-going topic of discussion among theologians. For further analysis of the subject see W. A. Grudem (1991), 'He Did not Descend into Hell: A Plea for Following Scripture instead of the Apostles' Creed', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, 103–13; D. P. Scaer (1992), 'He did Descend to Hell: In Defense of the Apostles' Creed', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35.1, 91–9; M. D. Williams (1999), 'He Descended into Hell? An Issue of Confessional Integrity', *Presbyterian* 25.2, 80–90; and M. J. Erickson (2000), 'Did Jesus Really Descend to Hell?' *Christianity Today* 44, 74.

37 All of Marcion's claims have survived through indirect references by St Irenaeus. See Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, in *PG* 7. For further discussion of Marcion's position on the *descensus* see Finch (1940), pp. 132–4.

> cum omnibus prophetis, et his qui placuerunt Deo, non participasse salute qui in Marcione fuit serpens praeconavit. Quoniam enim sciebant, inquit, Deum suum semper tentantem eos; et tunc tentare eum suspicati, non accucurrerunt Jesu, neque crediderunt annuntiationi ejus: et propterea remansisse animas eorum apud interos dixit.[38]

Although the form of the doctrine that Marcion shaped is not so important to this analysis of patristic commentary on the *descensus*, his mere attention to more specific details of the narrative is indicative of its appeal and developing orthodoxy. Furthermore, apart from being a fervent attack against Marcion's heretical view, Irenaeus' response reveals how significant the secondary doctrine had become within the Catholic Church and that the skeletal structure of the *descensus* motif was taking on a tangible form as more details were established and understood by patristic commentators. As is evident from Ireneaus' words, the *descensus* narrative confirmed the generally accepted hypothesis of the Church which suggested that Christ's Descent served to release the righteous who awaited His coming to Hell. However, Irenaeus' own theological stance reveals how the *descensus* story was evolving from a basic idea explaining where Christ departed to after His Crucifixion to an elaborate account of Christ's Harrowing of Hell, not only to rescue the righteous, but to redeem the lost sheep.[39]

J. A. MacCulloch notes that Irenaeus' position corresponded in a similar fashion to early Church Fathers, who believed that

> A strict theodicy demanded that those who lived before the Incarnation should share in the gospel. For Christ did not come on their account only who believed on him in the times of Tiberius Caesar, nor did God provide only for men now existing, but for all who, from the beginning, because of their excellency in their generation, both feared and loved God . . . For there is one God, who, as he guided the Patriarchs along his own providential ways, so he justified the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith.[40]

In this statement we see the doctrines of redemption and salvation as inclusive of everyone, even those deceased before Christ's Crucifixion, and the mediating factor involved the doctrine of the Descent. The emerging ideas within the message of the *descensus* became contributing factors in the

[38] *Adversus Haereses I.27.3*, *PG 7*. 'In addition to [Marcion's] blasphemy against God himself, he advanced this also, truly speaking as with the mouth of the devil, and saying all things in direct opposition to the truth, that Cain, and those like him, and the Sodomites, and the Egyptians, and others like them, and in fine, all the nations who walked in all sorts of abomination, were saved by the Lord and his descending into Hell, and on their running unto him and that they welcomed him into their Kingdom. But the serpent which was in Marcion declared that Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and those other righteous men who sprang from the Patriarch Abraham with all the Prophets and those who were pleasing to God, did not partake in salvation. For since those men, he says, knew their God was constantly tempting them, so now they suspected that he was tempting them and did not run to Jesus, or believe his announcement: and for this reason he declared that their souls remained in Hell'. Translation from ANCL 1, I.27. i, p. 352.

[39] Irenaeus' reference to Christ's Descent into Hell echoes Ps. 86: 13, Eph. 4: 9 and Luke 15: 4, which all suggest that Christ would deliver and redeem the captives from their bondage in the Underworld.

[40] MacCulloch (1930), pp. 91–2.

development of other doctrines such as purgatory, atonement of sins and baptismal regeneration. Essentially, the Descent had more precise implications for the sinful soul of everyman and provided a means of escape for sinners whether presently on earth or exiled in Hell.

Another significant contribution to the *descensus* motif came from Origen, the late-second- and early-third-century scholar, philosopher, theologian, exegete and student of Clement of Alexandria. Writing against the objections raised by the Platonist Celsus, Origen claimed that because Christ's death was historical and not merely mythological, the *descensus* was genuine and served as a redeeming act for men who had preceded Christ while offering hope for the future salvation of all men.[41] Since the salvation of all mankind was key to Origen's philosophy, the *descensus* was a linchpin in his theory, holding together the idea of universal salvation for everyone, Jewish or Greek, living before or after Christ's first Coming. Origen supported his argument with reference to a number of Old and New Testament passages, while also colouring the *descensus* story with additional details of his own.[42] The influence of Origen's view of the *descensus* 'is seen in many of the later fathers, especially in the east',[43] since many in the Eastern Church supported the idea that Christ continued His ministry of redemption in Hell that He began on earth. However, the idea of Christ redeeming the sinners in Hell was not without opposition.[44]

By the fourth and early part of the fifth centuries, the *descensus* became more commonly referred to as it gained ecumenical acceptance. Poets, hymn writers, orators and artists recognized the story's appeal, so it comes as no surprise that 'almost all of the men of compelling stature and importance within the Church left positive evidence of their inclusion of the *descensus* as an integral part of their theology'.[45] Despite facing disagreements on the particulars of the story, the *descensus* clearly had a solid footing in the minds of theologians. However, most biblical references were based more on allusions and required intense interpretation, rather than straightforward proof of such an event. Beginning in the late fourth century, the Monophysites developed a philosophical view relating to Christ's nature which suggested a unity of Christ's dual nature. In the process of defining Christ's nature, though, the Monophysites overstressed Christ's divinity, and because Christ's humanity was perceived with so little emphasis by the Monophysites, His humanity 'seemed to be absorbed as a drop of water by the ocean'.[46] The Christological debate continued, receiving

41 Amongst other claims raised by Celsus, he argued that the *descensus* was merely a myth not unlike those myths found in Greek mythology. See Origen's *Contra Celsum II*, *PG* 11.

42 Origen added numerous details to the *descensus* story, one of which includes suggesting that John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ in Hell, just as he was the forerunner for the Messiah on earth. See Origen's *In Luc. hom.* 4 (*PG* 13); *In Rom.* Vi. (*PG* 14), 10; *In Matt.* Xvi:10 (*PG* 13); and *In Numeros hom.* xviii (*PG* 12). See also Finch (1940), p. 148. For an examination of John's role as forerunner of Christ before His Descent as discussed in patristic commentary see D. Sheerin (1976), 'St John the Baptist in the Lower World', *Vigiliae Christianae* 30.1, 1–22.

43 White (1959), p. 50.

44 As Appendix 1 reveals, the Western Church formed its doctrine of the *descensus* more closely on the rescue of the righteous in Hell rather than the saving of all souls in Hell.

45 White (1959), p. 50.

46 R. Woolf (1958), 'Doctrinal Influences on *The Dream of the Rood*', *Medium Ævum* 27.3, 140.

attention from some of the Nicene and Post-Nicene writers who, along with discussing Christ's nature, gave particular attention to the *descensus*.

While a Christological debate would take place for over a century, the *descensus* rather surprisingly gained popularity among early Christians drawing further attention from patristic commentators.[47] Not only was this just a motif, the *descensus* was to become dogma within the Church. Ambrose of Milan, theologian, priest, soldier, liturgist and poet presents us with 'the greatest single number of references to the *descensus* exhibited by any Father of [the Post-Nicene] period',[48] although there are a number of references that cannot be assigned to him with complete certainty. Among the literature that can unquestionably be assigned to Ambrose, his treatise *De fide* explains how Christ's nature, although inclusive of humanity was exempt from death's power, therefore allowing Him to be free amongst the dead.[49] MacCulloch encapsulates Ambrose's commentary on the *descensus* by stating that

> The 'substance' of Christ was present in the Underworld. Then He exerted His power in the soul to set free the souls of the dead, to loose the bonds of death, to remit sins. By the token of His Resurrection He loosed the bonds of Hell and raised the souls of the righteous. The angels were spellbound at His victory; the heavenly hosts doubted. For a conqueror came adorned with wonderful spoils. Before Him went angels and archangels marveling at the prey wrestled from death. Beholding the trophy of the cross whereof the government was upon His shoulder, and the spoils borne by the everlasting Conqueror, the angels seeing his approach bade their princes lift up their gates: 'Lift up your gates . . . But some of them still stood amazed and asked 'Who is this King of Glory!' The others said 'It is the Lord strong and mighty'.[50]

To an extent, Ambrose's position agreed with that of earlier Latin Fathers in that Christ's soul, like all souls had to descend *ad inferos*. However, Ambrose's position differs from earlier traditional thought on the *descensus* by illuminating that Christ's human nature was not subject to the same conditions as the rest of humanity, therefore, giving Him supremacy over death. Ambrose's commentary further highlights the liturgical appeal that the *descensus* story acquired within the Medieval Church which would influence its later development into full-scale dramatic productions.[51] The resounding enquiry asking 'who this King of Glory?' became a standard feature of the

47 In the Council of Chalcedon (449), Pope Leo I established a razor-edge position in which Christ was defined as containing one person and two natures. The centuries that followed saw the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics of the period, a people of only comparatively recent conversion, accept western orthodoxy unquestionably. In 679, the Anglo-Saxons were first represented at an Ecumenical Council by Wilfred of Ripon, and through historical information from Bede, 'it is clear that heresies of Nestorius and Eutyches were a living issue in England for at least fifty years from about 675–752'. See Woolf (1958), p. 231. Bede's commentaries on the four Gospels are based on the works of the great Christian Fathers, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine and Gregory the Great.

48 Finch (1940), p. 170.

49 Finch (1940), p. 170, cites I Pet. 3: 19 and Acts 2: 24 as Ambrose's sources. For a list of Ambrosian references to the *descensus* see Appendix 1, pp. 187–8.

50 Ambrose, *De fide* III.4.3 and IV.6, *PL* 16; paraphrased by MacCulloch (1930), p. 120. See White (1959), p. 51.

51 See Ch. 3 on dramatic function within *John the Baptist's Prayer*.

Easter Liturgy which in turn allowed the antiphonal passages of respondents to become common characteristics in *descensus* re-enactments. The images conjured in re-enacting Christ's Descent became powerful tools to visually illustrate the redemption story, while the expressive and emotional responses from an audience functioned not only to encourage reflection on Christ's death and Resurrection but also to engage an audience in the salvation message.[52]

Referred to as 'indisputably the most learned Father of ancient Latin Christendom',[53] Jerome, monk, theologian, scholar and authoritative translator of the Vulgate, offers a great deal of analysis on the secondary doctrine. His commentary proved to be illuminating and pragmatic as he describes Christ's final ascent as a logical progression after descending. He explains that Christ's ascent is a result of Him already having descended 'primium in inferiores partes terrae'.[54] Making use of a variety of scripture and interpreting them allegorically, Jerome highlighted typological allusions to Christ's Descent that were fulfilled during the hours of Holy Saturday.[55] Jerome's contribution to the doctrine of the *descensus* provided critical links between Old Testament allusions and the Harrowing, thus further developing typological readings of Christ's pre-figuration, and consequently broadening scriptural references to the Harrowing.

This brief overview of the doctrine of the *descensus* would not be adequate without making mention of Augustine's position on the Descent, since his association with the establishment of doctrines vital to salvation and Christianity all together was highly influential. Given Augustine's unequivocal acceptance of the Roman Catholic Church's position and authority on matters of faith and salvation, it comes as no surprise that he agreed with the traditional view that the fifth-century Church maintained, despite the fact that the subject was perplexing for him.[56] Although he accepted that Christ did descend to Hell, Augustine found it difficult to rationalize the purpose of the Descent, since for him 'there could be no salvation after death except for those whose salvation [had] begun in this world by baptism, either in fact or through the baptism of desire'.[57] Understandably then, he found it presumptuous to promote any theory relating to Christ's purpose of descending to the Underworld since, for the bishop, there was no definitive scriptural backing.[58] Augustine's position puts him at a crossroads in early Christian thought as he unambiguously embraced Church doctrine. However, he found it difficult to defend certain doctrines, like that of the *descensus*, that relied heavily on typological connections rather than explicit scriptural references. White states that

52 See Ch. 3 on liturgy and its influence on the poem.
53 H. Cowan (1879), *Landmarks of Church History, to the Reformation*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, p. 47.
54 Literally, 'first to the territory below the earth'. Jerome, *Operum Mantissa*: *Com. In Eph. Ad Eph. cap.* Iv., *PL* 30, col. 832.
55 See Appendix 1, p. 191, on Jerome.
56 See Finch (1940), pp. 179–85.
57 C. A. Briggs (1913), *The Fundamental Christian Faith*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, p. 134.
58 See Augustine, *Epistola CLXIV*, I.ii. cols. 710–18, in *PL* 33.

> Standing at the outer edge of the early church, and not yet quite in the medieval church, Augustine seems to have been in some way out of tune with the times. Looking backward, he could not accept the exaggerated developments of the theologians before him, who had dramatized the *descensus* and made it a central part of doctrine, for he recognized many of the dangers inherent in the idea itself as well as in its agreement of the church and the scripture that 'Christ descended into Hell'.[59]

In his acceptance of Church doctrine, but avoidance of further development of the *descensus*, Augustine was careful in his approach to the topic, both aware of the complexities involved and conscious of the difficulties in determining the nature of the Underworld. However, this is not to suggest that Augustine did not contribute to the doctrine's dialogue; he certainly did whilst admitting without hesitation that 'vehementissime commovere'.[60] In response to previous enquiries that suggested a universal salvation message in I Peter 3: 18, Augustine treads softly around the subject of the Descent in his response. He claims:

> Et Dominum quidem carne mortificatum venisse in infernum, satis constat. Neque enim contradici potest vel prophetiae quae dixit, *Quoniam non derelinques animam meam in inferno*; quod ne aliter quisquam sapere auderet, in Actibus Apostolorum, idem Petrus exponit: vel ejusdem Petri illis verbis, quibus eum asserit *solvisse inferni dolores, in quibus impossibile erat eum teneri* (Psal. 15: 10, et Act. 2: 24, 27). Quis ergo nisi infidelis negaverit fuisse apud inferos Christum?[61]

By not making presumptuous leaps or scholarly conjectures about why Christ descended, Augustine avoids complicating the matter by maintaining that Christ unquestionably descended, as the scripture states. The enquiries that came out of the passage in I Peter were too numerous and complicated for Augustine and although he maintained the article of faith in principle, the specifics of the doctrine were perplexing and raised for him dangerous notions regarding the possibility of receiving salvation outside the boundaries established by the Church.[62] For Augustine then, a critical point in interpreting the verse in I Peter was to understand it as being a revelation to the 'Ancient Just beyond the realm of human understanding',[63] and his reassertion that salvation came through Christ alone diverged from earlier Christian notions concerned with the Descent, ultimately becoming foundation for the doctrine

59 White (1959), p. 52.

60 Augustine, *Epistola CLXIV*, I.i. 'it troubles me most seriously'.

61 *Epistola CLXIV*, I.ii.3 col. 710. 'It is established beyond question that after the Lord had been put to death in the flesh, 'he descended into Hell', for it is impossible to contradict what that prophecy said, 'thou wilt not leave my soul in Hell', a saying that Peter himself explains in the Acts of the Apostles, in case anyone might undertake to interpret it another way, or the words of the same Apostle, in which he affirms that the Lord, 'loosed the pains of Hell, in which it was not possible for Him to be held'. Therefore who except an infidel will deny that Christ was in Hell?' See n. 5 of this chapter for further information on I Pet. 3: 18.

62 Salvation, by the fourth century, was understood to come through the acceptance of Christ's death and Resurrection and through the sacrament of baptism. In his *De civitate Dei*, Augustine claims that no one is saved except through faith in Christ, mediating between God and man. See *De civitate Dei*, VII.xxxii, col. 221; X.xxv, col. 302–3; and X.xxxii, *PL* 41, col. 313–15.

63 R. V. Turner (1966), 'Descendit ad Inferos: Medieval Views on Christ's Descent into Hell and the Salvation of the Ancient Just', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27, 177.

of salvation understood throughout the Middle Ages.[64]

Given the large quantity of patristic commentary on the *descensus*, the examples I have provided regarding its development over the first five centuries after Christ's death might seem somewhat random; however, the examples were not chosen arbitrarily.[65] The concept of the *descensus* evolved from its vague roots within the Bible to a defined event outlined by a number of patristic commentators. The Latin and Greek Fathers selected in this chapter were either key figures in regards to commentating on the *descensus* and/or were respected and influential theologians within the Church who considered the *descensus* motif in some capacity. Whether emphasizing the significant change in how death and the Underworld was viewed, or discussing for what purpose Christ descended and for whom, the *descensus* provided an escape from Hell for all sinners who repented. The attention the motif received was due in part to the need to have a theological reason why the sinful could be redeemed, and since the essence of Christ's sacrifice was redemption of mankind, the Descent gave a logical and visual account of how the Old Law was reversed and the New Law established. Although theological progress concerning the particulars of the *descensus* was gradual, it was through such discussions by theologians that the strength and popularity of the *descensus* grew among Christians. Not only did it generate enough attention and approval to become a secondary doctrine, but it established itself as one of the highest form of statements of the Christian faith within the Apostles' Creed.

Eventually, with its popularity, the *descensus* theme evolved in a manner that manifested itself in connection with baptism. With allusions to rebirth and new life, the parallels between the motif and the sacrament do not take a stretch of the imagination. As a result, from quite early in Church history, partaking in the sacrament of baptism traditionally became connected with Eastertide so that new converts could participate in a death of the old self and beginning of a new life by symbolically emulating Christ's death, Descent and Resurrection during the most fitting of seasons.[66]

THE *DESCENSUS* AS PART OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

The *descensus* narrative stemmed from a number of small references in the Bible; theological discussion and patristic commentary strengthened belief in the doctrine enough so that it gradually became dogma within the Church. As I have noted, theological commentary on the secondary doctrine was neither without controversy nor without intense complexities surrounding its

64 Ibid. pp. 173–7. See also Finch (1940), pp. 179–85.

65 The controversy over the specifics of the *descensus* is extensive and complicated and it would divert attention from the Anglo-Saxon poem to outline the seemingly exhaustive list of commentary on the *descensus* over two millennia. However, I have highlighted a few early examples of the difficulties in interpreting and comprehending the idea, in order to illustrate how the concept evolved and developed into an established and familiar secondary doctrine by the time that the Exeter Book's *The Descent into Hell* was composed.

66 See Ch. 3, pp. 63–4, 68, 88–96 and Ch. 4, pp. 108–14 and 130–2.

specifics, yet during the Fourth Synod of Sirmium in 359, the clause *descendit ad inferos*[67] was introduced to the Apostles' Creed.[68] The earliest orthodox Creed which contains the *descensus* clause is found in the church of Aquileia, *c.* 390, although earlier versions of the Creed were in existence in the preceding two centuries. The fourth-century commentator Tyrannius Rufinus provides the earliest commentary on the Descent in relation to the Creed, asserting the notion that the Creed itself could be traced back to apostolic times and 'The reason why [it was initially] not written down on paper or parchment [was because it was] retained in the believers' hearts, to ensure that it [had] been learned from the tradition handed down from the Apostles, and not from written texts which occasionally fall into the hands of unbelievers'.[69] This oral tradition persisted in Anglo-Saxon England, and it was not for a number of centuries after the English conversion to Christianity that the statements of faith declared in the Creed were documented.[70]

The logic behind accepting the declaration of the *descensus* within the Apostles' Creed by the Church is straightforward enough in that the line in the Credo completes a gap in the timeline from the moment of Christ's Crucifixion through to His Ascension. Simply put, the clause 'He descended into Hell' served a simple purpose, all the while giving no definitive explanation as to what Christ accomplished in Hell. However, since all the acts within the Creed are saving acts, the line referring to the *descensus* serves to emphasize another 'important stage in His work of Salvation'.[71] Despite the fact that over the course of five centuries patristic commentators disputed whether Christ preached in Hell or not, they could all agree that Christ conquered death and at the very least, saved the Ancient Just from Satan's control. Church teaching never established the *descensus* concept with complete clarity, although the idea leant itself to the development of other Christian doctrines such as Limbus

67 Literally, 'he descended into Hell'. Article V of the Apostles' Creed. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc/index.htm>.

68 For more detailed discussion on the different versions of the Creed and the establishment and supremacy of the Apostles' Creed see L. H. Westra (2002), *The Apostles' Creed Origin, History, and Some Early Commentaries*. Turnhout: Brepols; F. M. Young (1991), *The Making of the Creeds*. London: SCM Press; H. Küng (1979), *An Ecumenical Confession of Faith?* New York: Seabury Press. See also A. Ehrhardt (1962), 'Christianity before the Apostles' Creed', *The Harvard Theological Review* 55.2, 73–119; J. N. D. Kelly (ed.) (1955), *A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed by Rufinus*, trans. J. N. D. Kelly. New York: The Newman Press; H. B. Swete (1894), *The Apostles' Creed: Its Relation to Primitive Christianity*. London: C. J. Clay & Sons; P. Schaff (1881), *The Creeds of Christendom*. New York: Harper & Bros.; A. C. McGiffert (1902), *The Apostles' Creed: Its Origin, its Purpose, and its Historical Interpretation*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons; and J. Monnier (1904), *La Descente aux enfers: Étude de pensée religieuse d'art et de littérature*. Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, p. 147 ff.

69 Rufinus, trans. by Kelly (1955), p. 30.

70 The actual title of the Apostles' Creed first appeared in a document addressed to Pope Siricius, perhaps written by Ambrose, from the Council in Milan, in around 390, but the earliest written record of it is found in Pirmin, *Dicta abbatis Pirminii, de singulis libris canonicis scarapsus*, *c.* 710–14; *see PL* 89, col. 1029 ff. For further reading on the Apostles' Creed see J. N. D. Kelly (1972), *Early Christian Creeds*. 3rd ed. London: Longman, Green & Co., pp. 398–434; and H. Bettenson and C. Maunder (1999), *Documents of the Christian Church*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See Ch. 3, n. 172, for references on orality in Anglo-Saxon England.

71 Briggs (1913), p. 134.

Patrum, purgatory and atonement.

Despite the mysteriousness of details involved in the Harrowing, what is important to this study is that by the fourth century, the *descensus* was an established article of faith with firm footing within the Credo and by the seventh century, the Anglo-Saxon Church being relatively new in institution still would have closely followed the Roman orthodox views established for the Western Church. Thus, the Anglo-Saxons may not have made their own intellectual and/or theological developments relating to the Descent, but at the very least, they would have unequivocally accepted the dogmatic teachings on the matter as established by the Roman Catholic Church.

Evidently, the setting within *The Descent into Hell* would not have been foreign to the Anglo-Saxons. However, the poet exploits the *descensus* for a different purpose.[72] Although there is no way of telling how much patristic commentary the Anglo-Saxon poet was familiar with, undoubtedly he would have been familiar with the dogmatic structure of the article of faith expressed by the likes of Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine. Still, the poet was in no way confined or restricted by those views in his telling of the *descensus*. Like others before and after the Anglo-Saxon poet, the *descensus* 'lent itself to speculation by [many who] could expand on the rather cryptic statement in the Creed and the scattered references in the Bible, using all the resources at their disposal: citation of authorities, allegorical interpretations, and logic'.[73] Subsequently, not long after the clause was included in the Apostles' Creed, the first part of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* was composed, which would ultimately provide the Anglo-Saxon poet a launching pad for his unique treatment of the story.[74]

THE GOSPEL OF NICODEMUS

Evidently, the *descensus* account had attracted a great deal of interest, so much so, that the story was recorded in several apocryphal texts over at least the first five hundred years after Christ's death. Not only did the theme enjoy sustained popularity among Christians, interest in the narrative actually grew throughout the medieval period, especially in *descensus* representations in art and drama.[75] According to J. J. Campbell,

> The dating of all the apocrypha is a puzzle and a highly unsatisfactory one [for him]. Working from manuscripts of a much later date, scholars often assign speculative dates in the early centuries of the Christian era, giving as evidence certain ideas that are usually associated with Gnosticism, Manichaeism or other

72 For discussion on the purpose of the poem, see Ch. 3 and also pp. 140–2.

73 Turner (1966), p. 173.

74 Written in both Greek and Latin, the two versions of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* contain significant variants. For the sake of clarity, I will be referring to the Latin text, since that is the text that would have been most familiar in Anglo-Saxon England. Notably, this text was also translated into Old English. Bede was also familiar with the Latin text and context as he refers to it in his commentary on Eph. 1 and I Pet. 3: 19 (*PL* 93, 41–61).

75 See n. 1 of this chapter for suggested further reading on the *descensus* in art and drama within the Middle Ages.

> heresies which themselves are vaguely dated. Even if a given apocryphon may have originated among a heretical sect, in their transmission most of them were probably modified toward orthodoxy before circulating widely in the Middle Ages.[76]

Because dating of apocrypha is difficult to determine, I agree with Campbell's assertion that 'the logic which most scholars use to peel away layers of accretion towards an original core [is strikingly] tenuous and circumstantial'.[77] Given that there is neither a more systematic approach nor general consensus in dating the apocrypha I have chosen cautiously to refer to the dating and composition of apocrypha in more general terms. Despite the fact that many apocryphal versions of or references to the Descent narrative have been lost over time, the best-known apocryphal account of the *descensus* has survived, partly because of its popularity during the Middle Ages. The *Gospel of Nicodemus* (*Evangelium Nicodemi*) provides us with a detailed account of Christ's Descent into Hell which is rich in imagery and dialogue.[78] Although composition of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, which is comprised of two parts, developed over approximately two hundred years, 'the earlier [part, that being the *descensus Christi ad inferos*] is the more important of the two parts, so far as influence upon medieval literature and art is concerned'.[79]

Although continued speculation concerning the authenticity of the *descensus* author(s) persists, the contents within the text suggest that it was written by a Christian or Christians, as opposed to a pagan or someone uninformed of Christian doctrines or themes. White notes that 'the orthodoxy of the work stems directly from the early church concepts found in the canon of scripture, and which had been elaborated by imagination and literary tradition and

[76] J. J. Campbell (1982), 'To Hell and Back: Latin Tradition and Literary Use of the *Descensus ad inferos*', *Viator* 13, 129.

[77] Ibid.

[78] See Kim (1973). See also K. Tamburr (2007), *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, pp. 102–48; Z. Izydorczyk (1997), 'The Evangelium Nicodemi in the Latin Middle Ages', in *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*, ed. Z. Izydorczyk. Tempe: Arizona Board of Regents for Arizona State University, pp. 43–101. See also A. Westcott (1915), *The Gospel of Nicodemus and Kindred Documents*. London: Heath, Cranton & Ouseley. For English translations of the Greek manuscript see J. K. Elliot (2005), *The Apocryphal New Testament, A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation based on M. R. James*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 164–204. See also B. H. Cowper (1867), *The Apocryphal Gospels and Other Documents relating to the History of Christ*. Edinburgh: Williams & Norgate; and, C. Tischendorf (ed.) (1876), *Evangelia apocrypha adhibitis plurimis codicibus Graecis et Latinis maximam partem nunc primum consultis adque ineditorum copia insignibus*. Leipzig: Avenarius et Mendelssohn.

[79] Hulme (1907), §V. p. lxi. The two components of the story are known as the *Acta Pilati*, and the *Descensus Christi ad inferos*. Scholars generally agree that the two parts are quite separate and are uncertain as to when and how the two stories were eventually joined. See MacCulloch (1930), p. 150 ff. and White (1959), pp. 55–92, for further details regarding the origin of the two components of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Hulme (1907) asserts that 'according to the best authorities [the] two parts [comprising the *Gospel of Nicodemus*] originated at different times and in entire independence of each other, [however], the *descensus* is the older of the two, and it probably received its literary form as early as the second or third century, while the *Acta* did not exist in anything like its present form before the latter half of the fourth century or even the early fifth century' (§V. p. lxi). As a matter of convenience all succeeding references to the *Descensus Christi ad inferos* will be referred to as the *descensus*.

united with homiletical fervor and rhetorical emphasis'.[80] The main plot of the *descensus* follows the account of Simeon's sons, Leucius and Karinus, who rise from death after Christ's Resurrection and promise to record the events they witnessed in Hell following Christ's Harrowing.[81] Amongst the events described by the two observers are: a resonant description of Christ storming the gates of Hell, an engaging dialogue between Satan and a personified depiction of Hell, Christ's climactic confrontation and binding of Satan, and the Saviour's eventual rescuing of the souls who had for so long lived under duress within the dark and gloomy pit. The narrative is delivered with a 'wealth of figurative detail and rhetorical phrase'[82] and as White maintains, 'the writer displays technical skill and imaginative ability, [and] in choosing a popular tradition as his subject, he assured himself a place in early Christian literary history that has hardly been excelled'.[83] Essentially, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* brings together the theological and exegetical strands developing within the *descensus* tradition along with the imaginative ideas connected with it, all of which came into fruition with the literary skill of the text's author.

By the time of the early Middle Ages, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* was not unfamiliar in Western Europe and certainly known in Anglo-Saxon England.[84] In fact, at least one version, written in Old English, was in circulation there towards the end of the ninth century, and it is possible that the manuscript 'spent a portion of its career . . . at Exeter during Leofric's episcopacy'.[85] Furthermore, R. P. Wülcker argues that apart from making its way to England, versions of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* were found in Spain, France, Germany, Wales and Ireland.[86] Although it is intriguing to consider that the poet may have been in contact

80 White (1959), p. 57.

81 See J. Kroll (1932), *Gott und Hölle: der Mythos vom Descensuskampfe*. Leipzig: B. G. Teubner. According to Kroll, there are considerable grounds for believing there was a single author of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* whose name was Lucius Charinus, a second-century writer of several other apocryphal treatises. Kroll suggests that the two men within the text were conceived from Charinus' name, since having two witnesses was a typical motif in reporting divine manifestations.

82 White (1959), p. 92.

83 Ibid.

84 By this I mean in the centuries after the collapse of the Roman Empire and before the High Middle Ages (*c.* 1000–1400). In relation to England, this would have been from the time when Germanic tribes invaded and settled on the island in the early fifth century.

85 T. N. Hall (1996), 'The *Euangelium Nicodemi* and *Vindicta Saluatoris* in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Two Old English Apocrypha and their Manuscript Source: The Gospel of Nichodemus and the Avenging of the Saviour*, ed. J. E. Cross. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 36. As Hall notes, by the ninth century, the earliest known copy of the apocryphon to include the *descensus* was recorded. Before discovery of this text, in the form of manuscript Saint Omer 202, 'evidence for knowledge of a complete text of the apocryphon in Anglo-Saxon England was limited to a single Latin manuscript and three Old English translations' (p. 47).

86 R. P. Wülcker (1872), *Das Evangelium Nicodemi in der abendländischen Literatur*. Paderborn: F. Schöningh. On another note, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* appears in more than one source in Ireland. For further discussion on this topic see A. B. Kuypers (1902), *The Prayer Book of Aedeluald the Bishop, Commonly Called the 'Book of Cerne'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; O. J. Bergin (ed.) (1910), 'Translation of the Text of the *Harrowing of Hell*, as found in the *Book of Fermoy*', *Ériu* 4, 112–19. See also R. Atkinson (ed.) (1887), *The Passions and the Homilies from 'Leabhar breac'*. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy; and P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (2002), *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

with the actual manuscript, if it was, as T. N. Hall suggests, in Exeter during Leofric's lifetime, embracing the whole idea is a leap of faith I am unwilling to take. However, the fact that elements of the *descensus* story are in the Exeter Book poem is evidence that the story's appeal and continued popularity among Christians was far-reaching over many centuries and great distances.

Although it is uncertain whether the poet knew of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* or the Anglo-Saxon translation of it, the story of Christ's Harrowing was clearly an inspiration for the poet and perhaps the seductive allure of the dramatic possibilities for the poet were too great to avoid. Evidence of the inspirational appeal is in the departure the poet takes from the narrative of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. In fact, the account of Christ's Harrowing of Hell in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* is far removed from the text readers are presented with in the Exeter Book poem, and in J. J. Campbell's study of the Descent motif in Old English poetry, he argues that 'it has appeared that Old English poets and prose writers used [the *Gospel of Nicodemus*] not at all, if indeed they even knew of its existence'.[87] However, many scholars have suggested that the *Gospel of Nicodemus* is the source 'on which the [*The Descent into Hell*] is ultimately based'.[88] Given that the poem's narrative and the sequence of events is such a departure from the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, it is quite unlikely that the apocryphal text was a direct source for the poem.[89] Nevertheless, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* is certainly instrumental in developing the central image involving Christ's Descent and remains the closest source relating to the poem, however relaxed that link might be.

With increased attention from theologians and having its roots in scripture, the motif of Christ's Descent began to mutate as its details developed, eventually leading to its place as a secondary Catholic doctrine with an established orthodox view, whilst also securing a position within the Apostles' Creed. Nearly coinciding with the theme gaining recognition within Church doctrine, the elaborate version of the *descensus* was recorded in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, thus, paving the way for patristic commentary on the subject. With the fairly natural acceptance of the story of Christ's Harrowing amongst early Christians, the imaginative appeal of the account made it a common theme of representation in art, literature and drama, onwards from the fifth century. Accordingly, the impact the story had on both clergy and laity alike, rather unsurprisingly led a number of patristic writers to spotlight Christ's Descent and Harrowing of Hell in their commentaries.

WHAT EXACTLY WAS THE APPEAL OF THE *DESCENSUS* STORY?

Certainly for the early Church, the appeal of the *descensus* story was multi-faceted. Not only did the story clarify a gap in the timeline between Christ's

87 Campbell (1982), p. 158.

88 Crotty (1939), p. 349. The idea that the *Gospel of Nicodemus* was the source of *The Descent into Hell* was first suggested by Wülcker (1872).

89 For an in-depth comparative analysis of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and *The Descent into Hell* see the first subsection in Ch. 4 of this edition.

death and Resurrection, but other issues connected with the Descent of Christ were rectified via the *descensus* motif. As White suggests, one of the most prominent ideas in the early Church connected with the motif was 'the notion of the deception of Satan . . . [where] some connected it with the doctrine of atonement, of Christ being a ransom for those held in captivity'.[90] According to this concept, Satan accepted the offer of Christ becoming a ransom in Hell since the Devil believed Christ was merely man. However, once Christ descended with full force and glory, Satan realized his own defeat in Christ's complete divinity. Thus, apart from the imaginative lure that the interval between Christ's Crucifixion and his Resurrection entertained, early believers took the central theme of the story, that being the *descensus* itself, as an opportunity to explore and highlight the heroic qualities of Christ in a sequence of events beginning with the Crucifixion. Undoubtedly, for Anglo-Saxons, the idea of the Lord setting out on a mission to rescue and free His retainers would have appeal to a group of people familiar with the comitatus society and whose literary roots were grounded in Germanic traditions.[91]

The heroic figure and 'the conception of God appearing as a conqueror in the lower regions of the world antedates the Christian era'[92] not only in Old Testament Scripture, but the idea of descending into the Underworld was a myth familiar to other cultures, either primitive or advanced.[93] It is plausible to suggest that the Judaeo-Christian *descensus* may very well have been borrowed from older stories concerning a descent into the Underworld since there were 'Babylonian, Persian, Egyptian and Grecian belief[s] in the descent of the spirits of the dead into a region of darkness and gloom'.[94] The *descensus* motif, then, contains a thread of familiarity relating to the soul, weaving together a common fabric of belief amongst various cultures.[95] Still, for early Christians, the doctrine was the result of amalgamating the Jewish doctrine of life after death and the events between Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection. In its most primitive form, the *descensus* was conceived as the apparatus in which to explain what Christ did in between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, and what was once a concise article of faith in an ancient Creed developed into an elaborate dramatic narrative encompassing the message of the Easter liturgy, with close associations to the sacrament of baptism. In the baptismal

90 White (1959), p. 70. It is worth pointing out that there are other purposes for the *descensus*. For full treatment of the most popular ideas connected with the *descensus* in the early Church see MacCulloch (1930), pp. 199–299; and White (1959), pp. 70–89.

91 See the fourth subsection of Ch. 3 for a discussion of the Germanic elements within the poem.

92 Hulme (1907), p. lxii.

93 For Old Testament examples see Ps. 24, Isa. 42: 7, 45: 2, 53: 8–9 and Hos. 6: 2, 13: 14. For further reading of myths and the Underworld see S. R. Burstein and C. S. Burne (1957), *The Handbook of Folk-lore*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, p. xxxix of the Introduction and pp. 113–32. See also G. Maspero (1901), *The Dawn of Civilization: Egypt and Chaldea*. Translated by M. L. McClure, ed. A. H. Sayce, 4th ed. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, p. 83. ff.; and Hulme (1907), p. lxii. For an extended discussion of the *descensus* as a myth in various cultures and races see J. A. MacCulloch (1964), *Eddic Mythology*. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, p. 306 ff.

94 Hulme (1907), p. lxii.

95 Ibid. pp. lxii–lxv.

act itself, Christians were, essentially, descending, like Christ did, and just like the Saviour ascended with a new form, so too, Christians could emerge with a new life. With such a close connection between the Harrowing and baptism, it comes as little surprise that the *descensus* motif commonly manifested itself in literature and art focusing on baptism. Unlike many biblical narratives, the *descensus* laid claim to such a small supply of scriptural references that the motif was more accessible to poetic and homiletical writers and artists to approach the theme with creativity.

The theme of the *descensus* was certainly familiar to the poet of *The Descent into Hell* or (as I prefer to call it) *John the Baptist's Prayer*, and he employs the motif with resourcefulness and an astute awareness of its connection with the Easter liturgy and baptism. Thus, he utilizes the *descensus* in a manner in which to take his audience on not so much a descent into Hell, but on a journey towards salvation and baptism.[96]

[96] See Ch. 3 of this edition for further discussion of the connection between the *descensus* and baptism and subsequent allusions within the Exeter Book poem.

3

Literary Analysis

Although *John the Baptist's Prayer* occupies only 137 lines of alliterative verse, the content within boasts of a richly layered work of literary skill. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the poem within the context of specific themes that will enhance our understanding of the poem's main theme whilst also facilitating an appreciation of the poet's resourcefulness, imaginative power and commitment to his audience.

THE TITLE OF THE POEM

The poem has generally been known as *The Descent into Hell* ever since late commentators changed it from the previous English title *The Harrowing of Hell*.[1] There is of course no title provided in the Exeter Book. Although there was a recognition that the name of the poem was not fitting, the new suggestion and the generally accepted title today is no more suitable than its predecessors. The issue about the title has not yet been resolved satisfactorily and the existing title of this Exeter Book poem has obviously been unsettling for more recent scholars as well. Some forty years ago, R. Trask recognized that the current title was unsuitable and suggested the title 'Christ and John' to replace the current one.[2] While Trask points out that the original title hardly does the poem justice, he only alludes to the issue in passing and does not press the matter. I hope to demonstrate that the current name of the poem is unsuitable and suggest titles that would be more appropriate for it.

J. Fisher explores the definition and function of a title, and in his appropriately named article called 'Entitling' he argues:

> While titles are names, they are a good deal more than just names. They are not necessarily descriptions, although they can contain descriptive elements. They are names for a purpose, not merely for the purpose of identification and designation, in spite of the important practical role which indexical names play

1 See Grein (1857); Kirkland (1885), p. 6; and Thorpe (1842). Thorpe first named the poem *The Harrowing of Hell* which was adopted and translated to *Höllenfahrt Christi* in Grein's edition. The title was later emended to *The Descent into Hell* by *ASPR* III, p. lxi, who argued that the term *harrowing* was suggestive of an actual departure from Hell which was not present in the poem, although it would be required in order for the term to suitably represent the poem.

2 Trask (1971) suggests that 'taking the speaker in the latter half of the poem to be John the Baptist, the poem might on a literal level be called simply "Christ and John"' (425).

> in the designative process. The unique purpose of titling is hermeneutical, [as] titles are names which function as guides to interpretation.[3]

By *hermeneutical*, Fisher explains that it 'is to allow for interpretive discourse, so if the title does not allow for interpretive discourse, it is nothing more than a label'.[4] If Fisher is correct in his assertion that there is a significant and meaningful connection between titles and the literary works they correspond with, and furthermore titles themselves function as guides to interpretation, then the current title *The Descent into Hell* functions as a guide to misinterpretation.

One reason why the poem was given its current title by early editors was because they based it on what is, I argue here, a misunderstanding of the poem's major theme. Certainly the poem does deal with one of the extended accounts of salvation history found in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, in which Christ freed the Ancient Just from their long captivity in Hell and, further, the poem is inextricably linked to the Easter liturgy.[5] From this, it seems that the editors have assigned the poem the title *The Descent into Hell*. Since early commentators had also established that the main source for the poem must have been the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, critics attempted to draw comparisons between the two works, while not only speculating that the poet's concern was to convey the story of Christ's Descent, but also concluding that the poem's title should somehow reflect this connection with its main source.[6] However, in naming the poem first *The Harrowing of Hell* and then afterwards *The Descent into Hell*, the only achievement editors made was in indicating the basic setting or backdrop of the poem, while in the process neglecting to point out its main emphasis.[7]

As some scholars have noted, the poem can appear inferior when compared to typical narratives involving the Harrowing, especially those that closely follow the account described in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. M. B. Bedingfield explains that

3 J. Fisher (1984), 'Entitling', *Critical Inquiry* 11.2, 288.

4 Ibid.

5 As previously noted, the account of Christ's Descent is not mentioned in the Bible, apart from a number of vague references scattered throughout. See Ch. 2, nn. 5–6, and Appendix 2 for a comprehensive list of scriptural references relating to the *descensus*. Christ's Descent is generally considered a legend, fully exploited in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, but the story itself is not an actual component of salvation history. The concept of redemption history rings more clearly through the echoes of baptism that dominate the poem, which I discuss further in this chapter. See the subsections on liturgy and baptism. For further discussion of the link between the poem and Easter liturgy see Trask (1971); and Izydorczyk (1990), pp. 439–45.

6 For a detailed discussion on the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the *descensus* see Chs. 2, pp. 47–50 and 4, pp. 104–17 of this edition. For further discussion on the theory of authorship in *Descensus Christi ad inferos* see Hulme (1907), p. lxi. For additional commentary regarding the author, composition, provenance and narrative of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, see G. C. O' Ceallaigh (1963), 'Dating the Commentaries of Nicodemus', *The Harvard Theological Review* 56.1, 21–58; Kim (1973); and Hall (1996).

7 Within the poem, there is very little reference made to the physical description of Hell and only the half-line *under bealuclommum* (line 65b) explicitly describes the grimness of the Underworld. References to John's anguish and suffering in Hell provide a sense of the psychological effects of suffering in the Underworld (lines 85–6, 98, 107), although any sort of a detailed description of Hell is absent, apart from typical descriptions of the Underworld as a 'dark place' (line 55a).

the central elements of the Harrowing in its narrative developments include

> The appearance of a light in the darkness of Hell, the complaints/questions of the devils into the abyss, the plaints of the faithful (including the likes of Abraham and David, and often several of the Prophets) to be freed, and then of Adam and, especially, Eve, who invokes her daughter Mary. Quite frequently, the Harrowing is followed by an account of the end of the world.[8]

Unlike the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* or other prose or poetic works in which the central theme is concerned with Christ's Descent, the poem of the Exeter Book gives one brief line to Christ's actual entrance into Hell.[9] We are not presented with a grandiose or spectacular image of Christ's Descent, in which the Saviour, leading a heavenly host, bravely and mightily breaks through the gates of Hell with divine strength and force in order to free the righteous from Hell. The narrator, not to distract us from the baptismal focus, simply explains in one brief line: *ac þā locu fēollan / clūster of þām ceastrum; cyning in ōþrād* (lines 39b–40). Not to understate the dramatic events, the poet's decision to condense the description of Christ's Descent into Hell into one line of poetry functions to move the action along quickly and efficiently without detracting from the main theme of the poem that focuses, not simply on salvation history, but a salvation message for readers.

Just as the poem shares little resemblance with other Harrowing accounts in terms of describing Christ's actual Descent, the poem also contains no verbal responses by the Devil and his minions, no personification of Hell itself, and no dialogue between Satan and Hell. For those familiar with the Harrowing account presented in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the dramatic episode involving a verbal exchange between Satan and personified Hell is both fascinating and remarkably comedic as the ancient enemies not only anticipate Christ's grand entrance, but attempt to deflect their failure at not being able to keep Him out, by hurling insults and accusations at one other.[10] However, in the

8 Bedingfield (2002), *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, p. 145.

9 See esp. *Christ I and II*, *Christ and Satan*, *Guthlac B* and *Dream of the Rood*.

10 One comedic example within the *Gospel of Nicodemus* includes an episode when personified Death and Hell are presented as ridiculous cowards who easily surrender to Christ and even praise Him when they previously had flaunted their strength and supposed triumph over Him. 'Inferus et Mors et impia officia eorum cum crudelibus ministris expauerunt in propriis regnis agnitam tanti luminis claritatem dum Christum repente in suis sedibus uiderunt, et exclamauerunt dicentes: "victi sumus a te. Quis es tu qui a domino dirigis confusionem nostrum? Quis es tu qui sine exitio corruptionis, incorruptum argumentum maiestatis, furore condempnas potestatem nostrum? Quis es tu tam magnus et paruus, humilis et excelsus, miles et imperator, in formam serui admirabilis prelator, et rex gloriae mortuus et uiuus, quem crux portauit occisum?"' (*Evangelium Nicodemi*. XXII. 1). 'Hell and Death and their impious servants with their cruel ministers were afraid in their own realms once the brightness of such a great light had been perceived, when they suddenly saw Christ in their dwellings and exclaimed saying: "We have been conquered by you. Who are you who bring about our confounding from the Lord? Who are you, without damage from corruption, [bring about] an incorruptible proof of your majesty [and] with your fury confound our power. Who are you so great and [yet] so small, [so] humble and [yet so] exalted, a soldier and general, a marvelous warrior in the form of a servant, and the King of Glory dead yet alive whom the cross bore slain upon it?"' Another comedic example is when personified Hell blames Satan for their defeat by Christ and accuses Satan of not thinking his plan through. 'Tunc Inferus

poem of the Exeter Book the poet makes no mention of Satan's response and/or reaction to Christ's appearance. In fact Satan does not speak at all, while Hell remains a static, but grim location, 'shrouded in darkness', as the narrator states in line 55a. Satan and his minions normally demonstrate at the climax of traditional Harrowing narratives their defeat in a huge spectacle, while the righteous, represented by Adam and Eve, articulate gratitude, humility and praise for their Redeemer who has come to free them. Yet, in the Exeter Book poem, Adam and Eve remain silent along with the majority of the righteous (apart from John the Baptist) and the only hint of Satan's defeat comes in three lines that summarize the Saviour's motivation for His journey. The lines read: *Geseah hē [Iohannis] helle duru hædre scīnan, / þā þē longe ær bilocen wǣron, / beþeahte mid þȳstre* (lines 53–55a). Apart from those aspects of the Descent narrative which are briefly summed up or altogether missing from the Exeter Book poem, there is another key component also omitted that is usually found within works that deal with the Harrowing of Hell. Christ, who is obviously the central figure within the Harrowing narratives, often compellingly expresses His purpose, reprimands Satan, and comfortingly addresses the righteous as well. However, in the Exeter Book poem, the Saviour does not speak and apart from the poem's narrator, who opens the poem and closes it with a final message of thanksgiving to God, John the Baptist is the sole and central speaker within the text. Here again, the inclusion of John the Baptist as the one who receives Christ in Hell and as the one who speaks on behalf of the saints demonstrates a complete departure from Harrowing narratives both in literature and artistic depictions.[11] Throughout the history of *descensus* accounts, Adam is consistently presented as the first to receive Christ and address Him on behalf of humanity, while the Exeter Book poem, alone, depicts John the Baptist performing Adam's usual duties, as Adam himself remains silent amongst the crowd of saints.[12] Finally, as the poem concludes, there is no mention of the end of the world or Judgement Day. Rather, in the closing lines of the Exeter Book poem, the narrator graciously thanks Christ

suscipiens Satan principem cum nimia increpatione dixit ad eum: "O princeps perditionis et dux exterminationis Beelzebub, dirisio angelorum Dei, sputio iustorum, quid hec facere uoluisti? In cuius exicium mortis nobis tanta spolia promisisti? Ignorasti ut insipiens quid egisti"' (XXIII.1). 'Then Hell, taking up Prince Satan with great reproach, said to him: "O Prince of perdition and author of destruction, Beelzebub, the scorn of the angels and the spitting of the righteous, why did you want to do this? Why at the demise of this man did you promise so many spoils of His death? Were you a fool that you did not know what you were doing?"' Excerpts from J. E. Cross (ed.) (1996), *Evangelium Nichodemi. Two Old English Apocrypha and their Manuscript Source*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 220–4. Translations by J. E. Cross.

11 *Fȳsde hine þā to fore frēa moncynnes; / wolde heofona helm helle weallas / forbrecan ond forbȳgan, þǣre burge þrym /onginnan rēafian, reþust ealra cyninga* (lines 33–6). For further comparisons to John's voice in this poem and in other *descensus* narratives see Ch. 4, pp. 116–17, 121–3, 128 and Ch. 4, n. 38.

12 Although this representation of Adam as the main speaker is most common in poetic and prose versions of the *descensus* and Harrowing, there are examples where John is the foremost speaker in accounts described by patristic commentators. John the Baptist's representation as forerunner and soldier of Christ in the Underworld bears a striking resemblance to Gregory Thaumaturgus' third-century *Homilia IV* in *PG* 10, col. 1135. See also Appendix 1, p. 184 and Appendix 3, p. 200.

for the hope that He gives us through His baptism and through His example, essentially urging us to hasten on our own journey towards salvation through baptism. With an exhortation of praise, the narrator concludes the poem by declaring: *Swylce git Iohannis in Iordane / mid þȳ fullwihte fægre onbryrdon / ealne þisne middangeard, sīe þæs symle meotude þonc!* (lines 135–7). So what in the end would be the point of leaving out climactic, exciting, and traditional details of the Harrowing account? The departure from the apocryphal text is deliberate on the part of the poet who uses the scenario of Christ's Descent as a backdrop in order to present a message focused on the journey towards salvation.

This divergence from the apocryphal account of course does not mean that the *descensus* account is not significant within the poem's structure, but it is not the principal theme of the text. The direction that the poet takes readers on is a different journey. Readers are reminded of the Christian message of salvation as they are partaking in their own pilgrimages of the soul. The two Marys at the poem's opening, who journey to Christ's tomb early in the morning, and the example of Christ's crossing into Hell both symbolize the spiritual pilgrimage which the Anglo-Saxon audience should undertake. Likewise, the audience is reminded of the significance of baptism, prayers and good deeds by John's example. Although the source of the poem comes from the apocryphal text, the poem develops into a Christian message of hope; it draws on the metaphor of the soul's journey, the path to salvation through baptism and the associations with the Resurrection and rebirth that every Christian receives through baptism.

My argument, therefore, is that the main focus of the poem has to do more with John's prayer of praise and thanksgiving and less to do with Christ's actual Descent; consequently, the title *The Descent into Hell* distracts the modern reader from the poem's central theme of baptism, and misleads readers into thinking that this is a 'confusing and perhaps a clumsy' account, as Shippey suggests, of the Descent narrative.[13] However, the poem is not confusing in the least if it is read as a prayer of praise and thanksgiving with a brief introductory setting that is appropriate to the baptismal theme.[14] Because the narrative is concerned more with Christ's reception in Hell and the text is almost exclusively a liturgical 'hymn of thanks, praise and exhortation spoken [or sung] by John the Baptist',[15] it should be viewed on its own merits as an innovative approach to dealing with the salvation message rather than a failed attempt to describe Christ's Descent into Hell.

A change in the title might not have been enough to convince some critics of the poem's merits, such as Mackie, who first suggested that the poet was amateurish in his approach, that 'Some of the poem [was] nothing more than

[13] Shippey (1976) argues that 'when allowance has been made for the modes of "typological understanding", *The Descent into Hell* remains a confusing and perhaps a clumsy poem'. He further claims that the poem's 'originality is not denied, nor (if this is compatible with clumsiness) its self-assurance'(p. 42). The opposite view is stoutly maintained by both Hill (1972, 382–9) and Trask (1971), p. 424.

[14] The theme of baptism is discussed in greater detail in this chapter, pp. 91–6.

[15] Trask (1971), p. 425.

incoherent babbling', and further argued that the poem must have been a fragment.[16] However, Dobbie explains that 'there is nothing in the text as it stands in the manuscript which would warrant our considering it anything but a complete poem'.[17] We do not have to look too hard to discover that the poet's agenda is not to relay the account of the Harrowing to readers.

If we return to Fisher's definition that titles share a close relationship with texts and provide a means to interpretation, titles that are more fitting for the Exeter Book poem and meet the criteria previously mentioned are: 'John the Baptist's Prayer', 'The Benediction of John', 'John's Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving', 'John's Baptismal Prayer' or simply 'John's Prayer'. While Christ's Descent is integral to the poem (because it provides the setting for the narrative), the only speaker in the poem is John the Baptist whose obvious connection with baptism and whose message of hope and gratitude outweighs the brief reference to Christ's Harrowing, so it is really John's message that is at the core of the text. Baptism, prayer and liturgy are central to the poem, so indicating those themes in connection with John more overtly in the title would signify, more precisely, what the poem is about and help facilitate readings and interpretations of the poem. In keeping with traditional naming of Old English poems, I offer a concise title, while offering readers some indication of what the poem contains without misleading the audience or disclosing too many details. Essentially, the new title is more than a label, as the title *John the Baptist's Prayer* functions as a guide, leading readers in and indicating fundamental aspects of the text.

THE POEM IN ITS MANUSCRIPT CONTEXT

The emphasis on prayer and liturgy is presented in obvious ways, not only via the text itself, but also by way of the poem's location within the Exeter Book. It is no coincidence that the text is nestled in between two other poems that deal with prayer and salvation, being preceded first by the poem *Resignation* which deals with prayer for patience and humility along a journey corrupted by trials and Satan's temptations, and then followed by *Almsgiving*, a short poem concerned with personal salvation.[18] Although scholars have established that a single scribe recorded the works within the Exeter Book manuscript, it is unclear whether the scribe was also the anthologist who compiled the individual works within the manuscript. Although discussion of how the manuscript was compiled has been a cause for debate for some time, R. Liuzza suggests that the scribe or anthologist 'ordered the poems as they are in the

[16] Mackie (1934) argues that '*The Harrowing of Hell* give[s] the most trouble to a translator, since it is difficult to give a sensible rendering of lines or passages that can never have been anything but incoherent babbling' (p. vii). See also p. xxxviii in Mackie's edition for his comments on the poem's supposed fragmentary state. Cook (1900, repr. 1964), p. 130 also suggested that the poem was a fragment, possibly belonging to *Christ II*.

[17] *ASPR* III, p. lxi.

[18] See also Ch. 1, pp. 15–17 of this edition and n. 22 below.

manuscript because they fit together sensibly',[19] as opposed to being compiled by accident, arbitrarily or simply relating to the length of the poems.[20]

Since the manuscript is arguably laid out in sections dealing with different themes, the anthologist may have had something else in mind that critics of this poem have overlooked. The order of the poems within the manuscript seems to suggest that the anthologist compiled them in terms of themes, giving us an indication of how the Exeter Book, as a whole, should be read. Muir explains that the order of contents within the Exeter Book:

> is evidence that either the anthologist or the scribe participated actively in the manipulation and transmission of the texts as we have them. It should perhaps be of greatest interest to readers today, since it tells us more than other divisions and transitions do about how the poems were intended to be read at the moment they were anthologized.[21]

With Muir's claim in mind, it may be argued that the poem known as *The Descent into Hell* has been misnamed, since it is carefully set amidst poems that are overtly concentrated on prayer and Christian living.[22] Equipping the poem with a more suitable name is necessary, not only to represent the poem as a whole, but to recognize that it does suit its position within the Exeter Book.[23] In this case, the name *John the Baptist's Prayer* seems a suitable title, serving to represent the poem and its position in the manuscript succinctly without being ostentatious or too understated. Overall, the new and more appropriate title, *John the Baptist's Prayer*, would indicate to the modern reader what is at the core of the poem, as opposed to giving them false expectations of the contents. To furnish the poem with a name that is more fitting would be to warrant it value on its own merits, while also acknowledging that its main theme is not so unclear.[24]

19 Liuzza (1990), p. 3; Muir (2000), p. 21.

20 Liuzza (1990) explains: 'The poems . . . of the Exeter Book represent a manuscript sequence, poems perhaps by different authors but deliberately set and probably altered to be read as a series. Manuscript divisions and stylistic differences are less important than the thematic concatenations that bind the poems together . . . the model of textual unity suggests that an additional interpretative richness may be achieved by reading Old English poetry as the medieval reader would have read it, in series in its manuscript context; "monkish interpolation", as it cannot be avoided, should be recognized, understood, and embraced. The textual unity [of the Exeter Book] extending from *Christ I* to *Juliana* and perhaps beyond share a certain thematic, and to an extent stylistic, harmony that can only be called codicological or scribal unity' (10–11).

21 Muir (2000), p. 22.

22 The poem immediately preceding *John the Baptist's Prayer* is *Resignation*, a work consisting of a narrator's address to God expressing contrition for sins and requesting forgiveness. A series of short poems, *Almsgiving*, *Pharaoh* and *Lord's Prayer I*, which deal with salvation, Christian living and exhortation, follow *John the Baptist's Prayer*.

23 See Ch. 1, pp. 12–17 on the compilation of the Exeter Book and the poem's location within the codex.

24 Unless otherwise stated, I shall refer to the poem as *John the Baptist's Prayer* throughout the rest of this edition.

THE POET'S TREATMENT OF TIME

Reference to time within the poem can appear arbitrary, effectively giving the impression that the poet was inattentive in his consideration of time and its relation to the overall structure of the poem. However, this is not the case, since the handling of time and the sequence or unfolding of events within *John the Baptist's Prayer* demonstrates the pensive, well-considered manner in which the poem was constructed and the events were relayed. What is particularly interesting is not only the way temporal references are handled within the poem's overall structure, but also the poet's word choice which most certainly exemplifies a conscious effort to include specific words that conveyed layers of meaning.

Structurally, the poem begins with two symmetrical, eight-line units which include six and a half lines conveying the Marys' and disciples' sorrow coupled with their feelings of certain defeat and loss on Easter morning. Rather than amplify the Crucifixion narrative, the poet encapsulates the entire Crucifixion in the initial four lines of the poem. The first eight lines conclude with a line-and-a-half expressing the poet's awareness that the women's despair was misplaced. Curiously, both passages are cut into short, detached, half-explanatory units and in them active, finite verbs are dominant, effectively allowing for opening clauses to occur seven times in the first sixteen lines.[25] An analysis of the verbs in the early part of the poem provides clues regarding the treatment of time within its overall structure, and also illustrates immense effort in the poet's handling of time with a clear objective, to emphasize the necessity of baptism for Christians.

The poem opens somewhere *in media res* with the women who *ongunnon him on ūhtan* (line 1), to visit Christ's sepulchre on Easter morning. Since miraculous events are quite often depicted as happening in the early hours of the morning before the break of dawn, it is no surprise that setting out at *ūhtan* was in anticipation of a special occurrence.[26] The tone in *John the Baptist's Prayer* is quite unlike the mournful woman in the *Wife's Lament* whose mourning at dawn still leaves her with emptiness. The wife states that: *þonne ic on ūhtan āna gonge / under āctrēo geond þās eorðscrafu. / Þǣr ic sittan mōt sumorlangne dæg, / þǣre ic wēpan mæg mīne wræcsiþas* (lines 35–6).[27]

[25] The noblewomen 'began' (*Ongunnon*, line 1) to ready themselves; (because) they 'knew' (*wiston*, line 2) that Christ's body was in the sepulchre; (and) they 'wished' (*woldan*, line 4) to mourn him. Mary 'came' (*cwom*, line 9) at dawn, (and) 'summoned' (*hēht*, line 10) the other woman to go with her. The two 'sought' (*sōhton*, line 11) Christ's body in the tomb, where 'they knew' (*wiston*, line 12) he had been placed and where 'they imagined' (*wēndan*, line 14) he would remain.

[26] Quite often in the biblical tradition night/early morning is the time of divine intervention; *see* Ps. 19: 2, Luke 2: 8–14, Gen. 28: 11–19, I Sam. 3: 2–10. Among these positive examples, there are a number of examples associating the hours of darkness with negative connotations. Some examples include: Luke 22: 43–50, Ex. 11: 4–6, Job:36: 20. This idea of 'night-fear' is characterized in Anglo-Saxon poetry as well. See *Beowulf*, lines 115, 193, 702–3; *Dream of the Rood*, line 68. For further discussion on the night motif in poetry see C. Fitter (1997), 'The Poetic Nocturne: From Ancient Motif to Renaissance Genre', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 3.2.2, 1–61.

[27] 'Then I alone, in the early morning must walk / under the oak-tree, around this earth-cave. There I must sit for the length of the summer days, there I may weep my exile.'

Whereas the early morning provides no solace for the woman in the *Wife's Lament*, the sorrowful women in *John the Baptist's Prayer* who set out at the crack of dawn will not mourn as they had expected. At line 9 the poet speaks of Mary, who, in her grief, approached the tomb *on dægrēd*. It is interesting to note that at line 4 the preterite of *willan* is used as the women *woldan* to weep. Described in the past tense as having intended or wished to mourn as opposed to actively weeping, here the tone is almost one of anxiousness as the women are not yet mourning, but they anticipate arriving at their destination in order to embrace fully their state of sorrow. Furthermore, the fact that the women *woldan* to weep suggests that they were expecting to lament Christ's death at the tomb; however, the poet hints at the fact that the women's anticipated response will be different than expected. Although both *ūhtan* and *dægrēd* can be translated as *dawn*, 'daybreak' itself came in at least two varying degrees within Germanic culture. Whereas '*ūhtan* was pre-dawn or that point just before the sun was visible, *dægrēd* is later, after light is visible'.[28] It is apparent then that the poet's decision, firstly, to describe the women setting out *on ūhtan* and then subsequently to depict Mary at the tomb *on dægrēd* in line 9 demonstrates a clear passage of time throughout the opening scene while also exemplifying the poet's awareness of the distinction between the two dawn-related terms. The scene switches rather abruptly from the women's journey to the sepulchre to a concurrent episode at the tomb at line 17. Paralleling the opening scene where the women set out *on ūhtan*, the episode beginning at line 17 reads that at the same moment that the women began their journey, *þǣr cwōm on ūhtan ān engla þrēat, / behæfde hēapa wyn hǣlendes burg* (lines 17–18). Echoing the remark in the first line, at line seventeen the poet describes the throng of angels surrounding Christ's tomb *on ūhtan*. The poet could not possibly describe in great length the women's journey to the tomb and Christ's Harrowing simultaneously, so a good deal of literary and imaginative skill is employed to develop a structure within the first portion of the poem that describes the two events developing in tandem.

Further analysis of the poem's structure and more specific scrutiny concerning the ordering of events reveals a well constructed arrangement of the text. Apart from the concluding exhortation which includes statements in the present and has implications for the future, the events in the poem are expressed in past tense.[29] The opening, narrated segment reflected in the

[28] Conner (1980), p. 183. For an extended discussion on the different interpretations of *ūhtan* and *dægrēd* and their connection with other Germanic languages see J. Grimm (1883, repr. 2004), *Teutonic Mythology*, ed. and trans. J. S. Stallybrass. New York: Dover, II, p. 747. See also Hill (1972), p. 388, n.17.

[29] Although one can argue that the poet's use of verb-tense was partly controlled by the fact that Old English only allows for past and present simple verb-forms, implementation of verb tense is not entirely obligatory nor accidental on the part of the poet. The message of the soul's journey as well as inclusiveness of the audience is further emphasized through his choice of verb tense, so rather than construct the poem in either the past or present, he mixes the two tenses to draw his audience in, including them in part of the salvation history narrative and allowing them to make it *their* present. See Ch. 3 for further discussion of audience inclusion and participation.

first part of the poem provides a timeline of the women's journey indicating precisely when they began their early morning journey and reflecting on their discovery upon arrival at their destination (lines 1–8). At line 9, the poet reiterates the women's journey and establishes that *þæs ōþer þing / wiston þā wīfmenn, þā hȳ on weg cyrdon* (lines 15b–16). This echoing of events involving the women's journey gives readers a clear view of what previously transpired and connects the text to the subsequent passage that occurs simultaneously with that of the first series of events described. At the same time as the women begin their journey, the angels are described as surrounding Christ's tomb. Likewise, when Christ awakes, John speaks of His coming and prepares the Hell-dwellers for Christ's Harrowing (lines 19–32):

> Æþelinges līc
> onfēng fēores gæst, folde beofode,
> hlōgan helwaran; hagosteald onwōc
> mōdig from moldan, mægenþrym ārās
> sigefæst ond snottor. Sægde Iohannis,
> hæleð helwarum, hlyhhende spræc
> mōdig tō þǣre mengo ymb his mǣges [sīð]:
> 'Hæfde mē gehāten hǣlend ūser,
> þā hē mē on þisne sīð sendan wolde,
> þæt hē mē gesōht[e ymb s]iex mōnað,
> ealles folces fruma. Nū [is sē fyrst] sceacen.
> Wēne ic ful swīþe ond wītod, [telle
> þæt ūs] tō dæge, dryhten wille
> [sylfa] gesēcan, sigebearn godes'.

For John and the Hell-dwellers, it is *their* present time, although narration in past tense dominates the poem. The episode from lines 39–115 sets the narrative in present time for John as he recapitulates the purpose of Christ's visit. In the same manner that John's role in the biblical story involved foreshadowing Christ and preparing the people for His coming, John again functions as a messenger in Hell with the knowledge *þæt [Christ him] gesōht . . . siex mōnað* (line 28). As far as John is concerned, his role to prime the saints for Christ's visit continues to unfold, and he maintains this responsibility until the end of the poem with a shift in focus from the past (at the beginning of the poem) to John's present and mankind's future.[30] By the time the last portion of the poem is reached, one discovers that the transition from John's voice to the narrator's is seamless, as the narrator assumes John's previous role as messenger preparing the way for Christ. Lines 133–4, which read: *oferwurpe þū mid þȳ wætre, weoruda dryhten, / blīþe mōde ealle burgwaran* provide a smooth transition from John as speaker to the narrator who declares in lines 135–7: *swylce git Iohannis in Iordane*

[30] The reference to John as a herald preceding Christ is found in Isa. 40: 3; Mal. 3: 1; Matt. 3: 1–3; 11: 9–10; Luke 1: 36, 41; 2: 67–79; and John 1: 6–7. For further discussion of the six-month timeline see n. 85 of this chapter. See also Ch. 4, pp. 106–7 and Commentary at line 28. John the Baptist's prayer ends with reflection on his baptism of Christ in the Jordan (line 132) and a request to presently baptize and save the Hell-dwellers (line 134). An implied future security is suggested in John's appeal for God to baptize the righteous in Hell, and save them as well as the rest of humanity for all eternity.

/ mid þȳ fullwihte fægre onbryrdon / ealne þisne middangeard, sīe þæs symle meotude þonc! What the poem in its entirety reveals is that, at its structural core, there are several levels of time occurring simultaneously; however they are all events from an earlier period of time subsequently narrated in past tense.[31] What brings the poem together are the concluding three lines which connect past, present and future. This switching between time and reflecting on the past, speaking in the present and anticipation of the future, provides the intricate connective tissue for the poem, interlocking the episodes of the poem together and linking them in such a manner that the story interweaves the past into the present whilst at the same time connecting present actions, as demonstrated through the act of baptism, as a means to securing everlasting life. John speaks on behalf of the past saints who stand behind him while also speaking on behalf of a collective humanity and future generations; his message applies both locally and universally. John's message encourages readers to prepare for the Second Coming, while also reflecting on the fulfilment of baptism achieved through the inspiring events exemplified through Christ and John's own actions.

Apart from demonstrating an understanding of the different phases of the morning, the poet's explicit temporal references and specific vocabulary within the text give readers some indication of the complex thought process that went into the poem's composition. What the poet articulates is that, at the exact time the women began their journey in the early hours of the morning, something miraculous happened: Christ descended into Hell.[32] These particular concurrent episodes carry much more meaning when the two scenes are evaluated together. Although the women embark on a journey to Christ's tomb to bring comfort to Him, it is He at that very moment, paradoxically, who sets out on a mission to bring eternal solace to the awaiting saints, once life is restored to Him. Effectively, the women's 'efforts to bring comfort to the Son of God are allegorical representations of the much greater solace He brings to the sons of men'.[33] *On ūhtan* in line 17 not only signifies the time of the women's journey, but that precise time of the morning is connected with lines 33–42a, thus providing a parallel between the women's journey and 'Christ's progression toward His ultimate destination, [involving] the conquering of death'.[34] In accordance with these concurrent episodes that mirror each other on literal and allegorical levels in the early part of the poem, the poet seizes the opportunity to exhibit a deeper understanding of the paschal narrative by unifying his reworking of the *descensus* story with the themes of baptism and the Resurrection while further emphasizing their connection to Easter liturgy.[35] The associations between Christ's Descent and Resurrection and the

31 John's speech is in his present, although the whole structure of the poem is a narrative from the past. The narrator at the end of the poem, however, brings the poem out of the past and into the present for the audience by reflecting on John's previous message, whilst also looking forward to eternity and eternal life through the call to baptism.

32 For further discussion of *on ūhtan* see Commentary on line 1.

33 Conner (1980), p. 183.

34 Ibid.

35 While the literal level includes the women's physical journey to Christ's tomb, the allegorical level involves the soul's journey towards salvation.

baptismal sacrament are well established, as the act of descending into the water and rising symbolizes death of the old self and rebirth.[36] The pilgrimage that the women take and the expedition that Christ embarks on both indicate a journey towards a new life, and as readers follow along on each journey, the poet reveals that, in preparing his audience to accompany the women on their journey, he is preparing the human soul more generally for a journey. In this way, readers become participants in the eternal present that the poet creates. What the poet suggests is that Christians must descend daily, not just once or at a specific time of the year, and he advocates that all must partake in the recommitment to Christ each day. Conner contends:

> It is, then, entirely appropriate that the *Vespere autem* should be employed here. It has the same temporal references as would be found in the vigil, its liturgical context which ends with the dawning of the day of the Resurrection and the angel's saying, *Non est hic; surrexit sicut praedixerat*. It is important in the symbology of baptism that the Holy Sabbath ritual is basically a preparation for the Resurrection.[37]

Thus, these Easter connections are all connected with the soul's journey emphasized in the poem. The loss expressed by the mourning women who begin their journey represents the emptiness of the soul without Christ, while descending into the waters of baptism and ascending anew allows for reflection on the events of Easter and provides hope in this life and the prospect of eternal bliss.

In addition to other words that highlight the poet's treatment of time, the use of *wiston* in line 2, echoed in line 12, illustrates how 'the poet [himself] repeats the process [of coming to realization by], saying again that the women went to the sepulchre where they knew the body was laid'.[38] The verbal repetition emphasizes the knowledge, or rather, false knowledge of the disciples who remain behind and the women who 'know' something else. Whereas it is established from the beginning of the poem that the women are preparing for their journey, the men, on the other hand, remain at their meeting place, with the certainty that their Saviour is dead.[39] The women too, as is reiterated in lines 11–13, embark on their journey with the knowledge that Christ is in the tomb, and like the men, they rely on false knowledge of Christ's current state and location. The interesting turnabout is at lines 15–16, which suggests that the women *wiston* something other than what was previously thought about Christ's death *þā hȳ on weg cyrdon*. Although there is no indication that the women have encountered a revelation or met the angels, by this point, whether by intuition, presentiment or some other inkling, they know that setting out on their journey was necessary because they were about to discover something different from what was previously expected. Similarly, the poem's audience has been invited to put aside its knowledge, to share once again the

[36] See the subsection on baptism, pp. 91–6.
[37] Conner (1980), p. 183. For details of the *Vespere autem* and its connection with the poem, see Ch. 3, pp. 87–8 and n. 120 of this chapter.
[38] Shippey (1976), p. 38.
[39] *wiston gumena gemōt / æþelinges līc eorðærne biþeaht*, lines 2–3.

ignorance, or rather the false knowledge of the Marys and follow along on the journey. As Shippey explains:

> There should be no doubt that the poet knew what he was doing, though the suddenness and obscurity of his language have (as so often with Old English poetry) led to alternative readings, especially of lines 7–8. But in this first twenty lines or so he shows a consistent enthusiasm for the spectacle of human ignorance marching confidently to a rendezvous with superior power: not because he finds ignorance comic, like the author of *Judith* – though lines 15–16 come close to this – but because he delights in the idea of power, of a single event altering, in ever widening circles, the belief of the Maries, the stability of the earth, the state of affairs in Hell, the course of history.[40]

Another interesting feature in the poem relating to temporal references is found with the poet's treatment of the apostrophes or more specifically the first, third and fourth apostrophes. The first apostrophe to Gabriel is reminiscent of Luke 1: 41 in which John responds to Gabriel's temporal message on earth, while yet in his mother's womb.[41] In lines 76–83, in praise of Gabriel, John now speaks of the message's infinite significance in a figurative kind of womb as he awaits Christ's light and a new life in Heaven. As the Gospel's heavenly messenger gave news of the promise to all men who up until that time had only anticipated Christ's coming, the poem's John continues to herald the message of hope for Christ's return even in the bosom of Hell. The plural pronoun *wē* in line 80 signifies a universal, figuratively applying to everyone, born or unborn, on earth or in Hell; thus: *bidan wē þæs longe, / sētan on sorgum* (lines 80b–81a). The poet develops a link between earth, Heaven and Hell through John's words and location. Although John is presently in Hell he represents humanity on earth, yet he is still able to communicate with the angel Gabriel. This interaction with the angelic in Heaven functions didactically as John's words from Hell encourage the poem's audience to consider baptism for the sake of the soul's future.[42]

In the third and fourth apostrophes, John addresses Jerusalem and the river Jordan (lines 99–106). *ASPR* comments on the problems raised by this passage by outlining the difficulty in pinning down a definitive interpretation.[43] If

40 Shippey (1976), p. 39.

41 Luke 1: 41 reads: 'et factum est ut audivit salutationem Mariae Elisabeth exultavit infans in utero eius et repleta est Spiritu Sancto Elisabeth.' ('And it came to pass, that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.')

42 Here the poet echoes Gregory the Great in his *Dialogue* 4.60, in which he states that 'the lowest are bound to the highest, the earthly are joined with the heavenly and out of the visible and the invisible a union is created'. Translation by O. J. Zimmerman taken from *Dialogues by Saint Gregory the Great*. New York: Fathers of the Church (1959), p. 202.

43 *ASPR* III, pp. lxxxix–cxvii, notes that interpreting lines 102–5 is very difficult. The editors argue that if *Ne,* line 101a, is retained, we must assume that in writing lines 101–2 the poet had in mind some such passage as Luke 19: 41–4, which describes Christ's grief over approaching Jerusalem and visualizing its future destruction and emptiness. The scripture reads: 'et ut adpropinquavit videns civitatem flevit super illam dicens quia si cognovisses et tu et quidem in hac die tua quae ad pacem tibi nunc autem abscondita sunt ab oculis tuis quia venient dies in te et circumdabunt te inimici tui vallo et circumdabunt te et coangustabunt te undique ad terram prosternent te et filios qui in te sunt et non relinquent in te lapidem super lapidem eo quod non cognoveris tempus visitationis tuae.' ('And when he drew near,

the passage is understood in relation to a timeline of Christ's life and death, the difficulties in interpretation are to a large extent obviated. Hill notes that the influential sixth-century work, the *Protoevangelium*, is reminiscent of the apostrophes in *John the Baptist's Prayer*.[44] In the *Protoevangelium*, the narrator explains Christ's birth from the Virgin Mary and states that since Joseph and Mary were in a desert place when Mary went into labour, she was taken to a cave while Joseph searched for a midwife. Joseph then speaks in the first-person describing the miraculous event of Christ's birth. Joseph narrates:

> Now I Joseph was walking, and I walked not. And I looked up to the air and saw the air in amazement. And I looked up unto the pole of the Heaven and saw it standing still, and the fowls of the Heaven without motion. And I looked upon the earth and saw a dish set, and workmen lying by it, and their hands were in the dish: and they that were chewing chewed not, and they that were lifting their food lifted it not, and they that put it to their mouth put it not thereto, but the faces of all of them were looking upward. And behold there were sheep being driven, and they went not forward but stood still; and the shepherd lifted his hand to smite them with his staff, and his hand remained up. And I looked upon the stream of the river and saw the mouths of the kids upon the water and they drank not. And of a sudden all things moved onward in their course.[45]

The cosmic stasis not only illustrates the possibility that the *John the Baptist's Prayer*-poet could have had access to a version of the *Protoevangelium* or some intermediate text which was influenced by it, but also that the holy city Jerusalem and the holy river Jordan were completely still when Christ was born. No citizens moved throughout Jerusalem, Jordan ceased to flow and the water stood still *in þǣre stōwe* (lines 100 and 104). The force and intensity of when *folde beofode* (line 20) after Christ's life returned to Him contrasts with the calm tranquility associated with His birth as earth and waters *in þǣre stōwe stille gewunadest* (lines 100 and 104).[46] Additionally, there was a legend

> seeing the city, he wept over it, saying: If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace; but now they are hidden from thy eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and straiten thee on every side, And beat thee flat to the ground, and thy children who are in thee: and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone: because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation.') For further discussion of the problems with interpreting lines 99–106 see Commentary on pp. 173–4.

44 Hill (1972), p. 383.

45 The *Protoevangelium*, XVIII, 2. Translation from M. R. James (1924, repr. 1966), *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 46. For the original Greek, see C. Tischendorf (ed.) (1876), *Protoevangelium in evangelia apocrypha*, 2nd ed. Leipzig: Avenarius and Mendelssohn, pp. 34–5. For further critical discussion of the *Protoevangelium* see O. Cullman (1963), 'The Protoevangelium of James', in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher. trans. R. McL. Wilson. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press I, 370–4. Hill (1972), p. 384.

46 This standing-still of the water, and the trembling of the earth upon Christ's Resurrection (line 77b), are similarly found in Song 67 of the *Heliand*. See R. G. Murphy (1992). *Translation and Commentary. The Heliand. The Saxon Gospel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. The *Heliand*-poet describes the event thus: 'the protector of the Land died on the rope, amazing signs were worked immediately so that the Ruler's death, His last day, would be recognized by the many speechless beings. Earth fields cracked apart. The colourful curtain so wonderfully woven which had for man a day been hanging without harm inside the shrine . . . was torn in two down the middle' (p. 187). The New Testament account of cosmic events is minimal; however, both the *Heliand*-poet and the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* emphasize these

current in England and elsewhere in the Middle Ages that the Jordan River stood still when Christ was baptized.[47] This is not widely seen in materials deriving from doctrinally orthodox sources, however there is reference to it in *Vercelli Homily XVI*, where the homilist states *þa wæs geworden in þa tid, þe se Hælend in þæt wæter astag, þa gecyrde se sæflode and se stream eall on bæcling and swa stille gestod þæt flod. Swylce he flowan ne meahte, ac he wæs swiðe mid þy godcundan egesan geþreatod þæt he hine ne styrian ne dorste* (lines 49–53).[48] This passage exemplifies an underlying tradition in Christian writing in which natural forces were affected by or responded to events in Christ's life. As Hill claims, 'the philosophical assumption which apparently underlies this tradition is that the moment at which Christ was born was a crucial juncture in the sacral history of the world, and at this moment the world stood still'.[49] The poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* utilizes the tradition of cosmic stasis to emphasize not only Christ's influence over nature, but also the importance of the event of baptism itself. Hill further argues that 'the lyric passage of which [the apostrophes] form a part is more tightly organized than has been recognized',[50] and are crucial to the overall structure of the poem. Ultimately, the four apostrophes collectively reflect on aspects of Christ's birth, which juxtaposes his Crucifixion and Harrowing. What this juxtaposing achieves is to exemplify two transitional phases in Christ's career and provide a unifying structure to the poem in its entirety by discussing, albeit, in reverse order, the moment of Christ's Resurrection and Harrowing, and the moment of his birth.[51]

The treatment of temporal references provides unity to the overall structure of the poem. The action develops and the sequence of events unfolds in a non-linear manner which allows the poet to control and, to a certain extent, manipulate his audience. As the narrative begins with the mourning women journeying to an empty tomb, the audience is led to believe that the main theme will focus on the narrative of the *descensus* and Harrowing, but, as the narrative develops, the primary focus reveals John to be central to the poem's narrative. Attention never shifts from John's speech and experiences and the final voice of the narrator continues John's message by concluding

occurrences to demonstrate how the inanimate objects and entire cosmos acknowledged the events, responding and communicating what had happened in their own way (whilst also illustrating Christ's connection to the universe). See also Appendix 2 at lines 96–106 and Commentary to lines 53, 99–106.

47 This is further discussed in detail along with additional references to charms and homilies relating to cosmic stasis in Hieatt's (1990) article. According to Hieatt, the 'phenomenon [of cosmic stasis was] scarcely an invention of the homilist: it recounts one version of a story known in non-canonical sources in the east at a very early date. The most eloquent witness to its long survival in England and in western Europe, in general, is an exceptionally widespread charm for staunching blood known to German folklorists as the 'Jordan-Segan' and to students of Middle English as the 'flum Jordan' charm' (432).

48 P. E. Szarmach (ed.) (1981), *Vercelli Homilies IX–XXIII*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 44. 'And it happened at that time, when the Saviour descended into that water, the sea-flood and the entire current turned backwards and the river stood still. Likewise, it could not flow, but it was very greatly checked with the Heaven-sent terror that it did not dare to stir itself.'

49 Hill (1972), p. 385.

50 Ibid. p. 386.

51 For further discussion of the apostrophes see pp. 88–93 and chapter 4, pp. 116–17.

with a celebratory invocation of baptism. It then becomes apparent that the main theme is not simply to convey the events of the *descensus*. What the poet is doing is not necessarily narrating a past event; rather he creates a new interpretation of a past event, and in doing so he encourages his present audience, in whatever age or capacity, to be active participants. The repeated emphasis on baptism is used didactically to inform readers of the sacrament's connection with Easter and encourage Christians to undergo baptism or to contemplate the significance of this sacrament.[52] Thus, the closing lines of the poem consider the future and conclude with an invitation to participate in baptism while reflecting on everlasting life associated with the sacramental act. Since 'the poet is more interested in effect than in accuracy . . . the effect he aims at is prominent enough to make it even less likely that he was following faithfully some source which (as in too many other instances) happens to have been lost',[53] and consequently, the poem's theme reflects 'a triumphant and universal simultaneity'.[54] Through his treatment of time in its entirety the poet attempts to convey the fact that there is

> Truth in divine reality and time but also truth in human reality. The Resurrection is represented as neither a single scene nor an isolated image, but as part of [a] complex and highly articulate dramatic composition which develop[ed] the central theme of salvation through the sequence of historical events, arranged not according to the human experience of time – that is, the one first, the others following – but rather according to the sacral dimension of time. Therefore, these events could be considered as stopping places in God's design, each one with its own particular significance.[55]

The non-linear sequence of events which unfolds in the poem attempts to reflect divine perspective of time in which readers can envisage a series of events taking place simultaneously, rather than witnessing a single episode at a time. Each event within the poem is part of the narrative's complex composition, and while each separately has its own significance with regards to Christ's death and resurrection, reflecting on the various scenes as a unit encourages the audience on the Christian journey towards baptism and salvation.

By cloaking the main theme of baptism with the *descensus* narrative, the poet weaves together a series of biblical and apocryphal episodes in order to present a timely message of hope and redemption, and his concern for the soul and its connection with baptism and Easter is arguably dominant throughout. The poet's treatment of time is both carefully and cleverly arranged and this remarkable handling of temporal references and terminology offers a salvation message that remains timeless.

52 The poem's didactic function is further discussed on pp. 7, 90, 94, 103, 128, 130 and 141–2.
53 Shippey (1976), p. 38.
54 Ibid.
55 A. M. Luiselli Fadda (2007), 'The Mysterious Moment of Resurrection', in *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin*, ed. A. Minnis and J. Roberts. Turnhout: Brepols, p. 152.

BLENDING GERMANIC ELEMENTS WITH CHRISTIAN MOTIFS

Without oversimplifying the cultural integration between the newly established Church and Germanic settlers whose heathen practices were to some extent superseded by Christian ideas and rituals, at least in regards to the poetry, and certainly by the tenth century, echoes and reminisces of the pagan past were still prevalent in Anglo-Saxon Christian verse.[56] Accordingly, *John the Baptist's Prayer* bears a strong resemblance to other Christian, Old English verse with regards to the blending of Germanic imagery and language with religious themes and narratives.

Among the most dominant of pre-Christian traditions preserved in religious verse was the emphasis on the heroic ethos. With continued interest and prevalence of the heroic ideal within religious and secular Old English prose and poetry, the immense appeal that the *descensus* story would have had for the Anglo-Saxon people seems quite obvious. White claims that 'throughout Old English poetry, the pre-eminence of Christ is over-shadowing; Patriarchs and apostles and martyrs are retainers of the Heavenly King; Christians are considered servants, as *Miles Christi* in the great spiritual warfare'.[57] The most notable examples of Christ as a heroic warrior are in the ninth-century Old Saxon epic poem the *Heliand* and the tenth-century Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*.[58] The *Heliand*, meaning 'Saviour', is a biblical paraphrase of the Gospels, and is written in traditional alliterative Germanic verse. Incorporating Germanic language and imagery into the story of Christ's life, the *Heliand*-poet handles his subject with skill, demonstrating ingenuity in his treatment of his Gospel source in a similar fashion to that of the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer's* handling of the *descensus*.[59] A full analysis of the rich language and imagery in the *Heliand* is not offered here; however, it is fitting to examine the Old Saxon poem's treatment of Christ's death and Resurrection since it is one of

[56] Select studies of the Germanic origins of the Anglo-Saxons and subsequent Germanic influence on Old English Christian poetry include M. Alexander (2002), *A History of Old English Literature*. Peterborough: Broadview Press, pp. 51–70; P. Lendinara (2008), 'The Germanic Background', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. P. Pulsiano and E. Treharne. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 121–34; P. Lendinara (1996), 'The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 264–81; and R. Frank (1996), 'Germanic Legend in Old English Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 88–106. See also Ch. 1, n. 85. For discussion of the Harrowing in Old Norse poetry see G. L. Aho (1969), '*Niðrstigningarsaga*: An Old Norse Version of Christ's Harrowing of Hell', *Scandinavian Studies* 41.2, 150–9.

[57] White (1959), p. 131. For further reference to martial references relating to Christ in Old English literature see J. Hill (1981), 'The Soldier of Christ in Old English Prose and Poetry', *Leeds Studies in English* 12, 57–80.

[58] See also Ch. 4, pp. 133–5, for comparisons between *Dream of the Rood* and *John the Baptist's Prayer*.

[59] Although it should be noted that there are clear similarities between the two poems, especially with regards to the treatment of the mourning Marys and the actual Harrowing of Hell, the focus of this subsection is on the poetic treatment of the Germanic literary tradition in *John the Baptist's Prayer*. To focus too closely on the similarities and differences within the texts would detract from the main point of this subsection.

the richest examples of the blending of Christian and Germanic elements in its presentation of the Passion.[60] In Songs 58–71 of the *Heliand*, Christ and His disciples are depicted as warriors embattled in their last stand against an enemy force. After Christ's retainers desert Him, He is held hostage and eventually crucified. The scene of Christ's death is described with emotive power and His Resurrection impeccably illustrates the blending of the heroic tradition with Christian motifs. Song 68 states that on Easter day:

> It was not long then until: there was the spirit coming, by God's power, the holy breath, going under the hard stone to the corpse! Light was at that moment opened up, for the good of the sons of men; the many bolts on the doors of Hell were unlocked; the road from this world up to Heaven was built! Brilliantly, radiating, God's Peace-Child rose up! He went about, wherever He pleased in such a way that the guards, tough soldiers, were not at all aware of when He got up from death and arose from His rest.[61]

Here the visualization of Christ's life returning, as well as the opening of Hell's gates is described with imaginative enthusiasm, interspersed with heroic diction and hints of Germanic mythology.[62] According to White:

> Where Christianity failed to [fully] harmonize Anglo-Saxon pre-Christian ethics and social ideals, each was modified by the influence of the other. Old conceptions were preserved while being modified by the new; new ideas were introduced through and coloured by the old. Often the differences between native traditions and Christian ideas were not so much of kind as of degree, and the chief modifications came in the changing of proportions and emphases.[63]

In presenting Christ in a heroic way, with His band of vassals instrumental in the overall plan that the Supreme Chief, God, arranges to defeat the Enemy, the Old Saxon poem provides an effective model of the harmonization of Christian and Germanic traditions in portraying Christ's character. Similarly, *The Dream of the Rood*, like the *Heliand*, employs heroic verse and imagery in its treatment of Christ and the Passion.[64] The dream-vision within the Old English

60 Like many medieval literary treatments of biblical stories that embellished historical narratives, the *Heliand* is not historically accurate, but rather a conflated version of Christ's death and Resurrection which emphasized His divinity. For selected critical studies on the *Heliand* see Murphy (1992); J. E. Cathey (2002), *Heliand: Text and Commentary*. Morgantown: West Virginia University Press; R. G. Murphy (1997), 'The Light Worlds of the "Heliand"', *Monatshefte* 89.1, 5–17; M. Scott (trans.) (1966), *The Heliand*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. For linguistic studies on the *Heliand* see J. Eichhoff and I. Rauch (1973), *Der Heliand*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesselschaft; and G. Quispel and J. A. Huisman (1962), 'Der Heliand und das Thomasevangelium', *Vigiliae Christianae* 16.3/4, 121–53.

61 Murphy (1992), p. 191.

62 Murphy contends that the climax in this episode focuses on 'the road to Heaven [which] has been built' (p. 191). Since there is no reference to a road being built in New Testament Resurrection accounts, the poet may have been familiar with the presence of a road to the Germanic mythological version of Heaven. This 'road' has layers of meaning, not only referencing the Germanic mythological road, but alluding to the Christian concept of the creation of a path to Heaven when Christ defeated death and Hell by His Resurrection.

63 White (1959), p. 129.

64 For further discussion of the Germanic warrior motif in *Dream of the Rood* see A. Finlay (1986), 'The Warrior Christ and the Unarmed Hero', in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G. H. Russell*, ed. G. Kratzmann and J. Simpson. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, pp. 236–46; R. E. Diamond (1958), 'Heroic Diction in 'The Dream of the Rood',

poem recounts the narrator's vision of the Crucifixion as it was experienced through the eyes of the Cross. Both Christ and the Cross are presented as warriors and the Rood explains:

> Ongyrede hine þā geong hæleð (þæt wæs god ælmihtig),
> strang ond stīðmōd. Gestāh hē on gealgan hēanne,
> mōdig on manigra gesyhðe, þā hē wolde mancyn lysan.
> Bifode ic þā mē se beorn ymbclypte. Ne dorste ic hwæðre
> būgan tō eorðan,
> feallan tō foldan scēatum, ac ic sceolde fæste standan.
> Rōd wæs ic āræred. Āhōf ic rīcne cyning,
> heofona hlāford, hyldan mē ne dorste.[65]

Christ reflects an earthly lord and the personified Cross assumes the role of loyal retainer, and as Christ enthusiastically and heroically confronts His own death, He is supported unquestionably by His retainer. Undoubtedly, such heroic metaphors and diction would have appealed to an audience acclimatized to heroic verse.

Although it is unlikely that we will ever determine whether the influences of the Germanic literary tradition within *John the Baptist's Prayer* are due to the poet's military past of some sort, he was certainly armed with an impressive stock of references, themes and language from the Germanic tradition. Military imagery is abundant in the text through the various references to armor and battle scenery. As Christ hastened to Hell anticipating resistance from the Enemy who held the saints captive, *ne rōhte hē tō þǣre hilde helmberendra, / ne hē byrnwīgend tō þām burggeatum / lǣdan ne wolde* (lines 37–39a). Certainly with the plethora of battle imagery and accounts of war within the Bible it should come as little surprise that biblical martial allusions are scattered throughout *John the Baptist's Prayer* to emphasize the spiritual battle taking place on Holy Saturday. The vocabulary and allusions throughout the poem indicate that the poet was making the connection between an impending epic battle and the *descensus*, and in doing so, he drew from both the pre-Christian and Christian literary traditions to emphasize his point. From the first mention of Christ, the *æþeling* (lines 5 and 19), He embodies liege-lord status with earthly regality, yet He is also *sigebearn godes*, and *hlōgan helwaran* (lines 11, 32, 43 and 50), which are preparatory epithets for the forthcoming Triumphant Leader of all humanity. Through the vocabulary in the poem, there is no

in *Studies in Honor of John Wilcox*, ed. A. D. Wallace and W. O. Ross. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp. 3–7; M. L. del Mastro (1976), '"The Dream of the Rood" and the Militia Christi: Perspectives in Paradox', *American Benedictine Review* 27, 171–86; M. D. Cherniss (1973), 'The Cross as Christ's Weapon: The Influence of Heroic Literature on "The Dream of the Rood"', *Anglo-Saxon England* 2, 241–52; and C. J. Wolf (1970), 'Christ as Hero in "The Dream of the Rood"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 71, 202–10.

65 *Dream of the Rood*, lines 39–45. B. Mitchell and F. Robinson (eds.) (1999), *A Guide to Old English*. 5th ed. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 260. 'The Young Hero stripped himself then (that was God Almighty), strong and resolute. He ascended onto the high gallows, brave in the sight of many, there [since] he wished to release mankind. I trembled when the man embraced me. However, I dared not bow down to the earth, fall to the surface of the earth, but I had to stand fast. I was raised a cross. I lifted up the Mighty King, the Lord of the Heavens; I dared not bend down.'

contention that Christ is certainly a faithful servant of the king of Heaven and Christ's 'obedience even unto death secured for Him the sovereignty of the Underworld; [and] His Descent thither was the pledge of His lordship over it'.[66] This parallel between the earthly and spiritual lord is nothing new in Anglo-Saxon poetry, and in *John the Baptist's Prayer* the similarities are noticeably typical in that regard.[67]

Lines 37–39a, in which Christ is depicted as an earthly lord who has no need of armour and armoured warriors, present a rather modest and restrained description of Christ's journey, serving to avoid focusing extensively on the *descensus* whilst further functioning to move the action along quickly to get to the poem's core. Also, the passage carries a Christological message and in it the description of Christ without armour and soldiers illustrates that He no longer embodies partial divinity and He is impervious to attacks from the Enemy. This clever description of Christ without need of military companions serves to emphasize the realization of His complete divinity.[68] There is no need for earthly armour or of military support as He descends with complete divine authority and power. Heroic diction continues throughout the poem as Christ's troop of angels are deployed to His tomb as a heavenly host of heralds signals the coming of the Divine Warrior-King.[69] The poet establishes the scenario of the battle's inception, and as readers would expect to hear about Christ's victorious entrance into Hell like those examples represented in the *Heliand* and the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, in actuality a much more subdued description of the *descensus* is provided in *John the Baptist's Prayer*.[70] As mentioned, the poet maintains control of the pace of the action as Christ enters both quickly and without armour. In lines 33–40, the narrator explains:

> Fȳsde hine þā tō fore frēa moncynnes.
> Wolde heofona helm helle weallas
> forbrecan ond forbȳgan, þære burge þrym
> onginnan rēafian, reþust ealra cyninga.
> Ne rōhte hē tō þære hilde helmberendra,
> ne hē byrnwīgend tō þām burggeatum
> lǣdan ne wolde. Ac þā locu fēollan,
> clūstor of þām ceastrum; cyning in ōþrād . . .

Martial vocabulary and images exploited from the Germanic tradition would have been familiar to an Anglo-Saxon audience. However, in reducing the scene and limiting the martial images, the poet demonstrates that there is evidently something more significant at the poem's core.

66 Swete (1894), p. 60.

67 There are many instances in the poem where the earthly and spiritual lord are one and the same. For examples in *John the Baptist's Prayer* see *hagosteald* (line 21), *Æþelinges* (line 19), *mǣges* (line 25), *frēa* (line 33), *fruma* (line 41), *cyning* (lines 40, 85), *þēoden* (lines 59, 130).

68 Unlike the *Dream of the Rood*-poet, who seems to avoid Christological debate by negating Christ's pain and allowing the Cross to experience Christ's suffering, in lines 33–39a of *John the Baptist's Prayer*, the poet seems to have little issue with presenting Christ in His full divinity.

69 *Ac þǣr cwōm on ūhtan ān engla þrēat, / behæfde hēapa wyn hælendes burg. John the Baptist's Prayer*, lines 17–18.

70 See the first subsection of Ch. 4 of this edition.

It comes as no surprise that the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* borrowed from an abundant stock of Christian heroic imagery relating to Christ, and in a poem in which the Harrowing served as a backdrop, it is perfectly fitting that the heroic motif was utilized.[71] However, instead of amplifying Christ's image to enhance His depiction as a prominent figure in the text, the poet provides small glimpses of Christ and His representation throughout *John the Baptist's Prayer*. It is rather ironic then that although Christ's role is muted, the single bit of action in the poem is dependent on Him. Of the 137 lines within the poem, the liveliest action takes place at the moment when (lines 39b–43)

> þā locu fēollan,
> clūstor of þām ceastrum; cyning in ōþrād,
> ealles folces fruma forð ōnette,
> weoruda wuldorgiefa. Wræccan þrungon,
> hwylc hyra þæt sygebearn gesēon mōste.

Not only does His lone act trigger the events in the poem becoming the major link for the poem's main narrative, but additionally, His elusive, shadowy presence allows for further emphasis of the Hero's strength. In Christ's silence, He emphasizes a greater sense of power and dominance over darkness, since *þā locu fēollan / clūstor of þām ceastrum* (lines 39b–40a) with no mention of a word uttered. Not only does Christ's silence lend to the mystery and wonder of His character, but it affords for greater impact for His presence to be felt through John's words. As a warrior, Christ is honour-bound to harrow Hell, in a similar manner that duty-bound Beowulf loyally follows the Geatish king Hygelac's call to travel across the seas to aid Hrothgar, the Danish king, whose hall is under attack by Grendel.[72] Like Beowulf, who is initially unnamed, yet described as a faithful retainer, Christ's character in *John the Baptist's Prayer* also lacks a full description; however, He too is presented as a loyal servant. Although images and descriptions of Christ within the *descensus* motif are seemingly deficient, it is not a matter of the poet stripping Christ of His glory; rather the subdued scene of the valiant, Heavenly Lord is part of the poem's preface, ultimately setting the scene for the text's nucleus. John's initial speech reveals Christ to be an honour-bound warrior, rescuing His loyal *mǣge* (line 25), and his presence can be felt through reflections, as John's words form an image of Christ for the audience. John's words shape Christ's character in the poem, revealing Him to be an honourable liege lord, reminiscent of Hygelac at the

[71] Some other poems that employ the heroic motif in representations of Christ include *Dream of the Rood*, *Christ and Satan*, and the *Christ* poem, to name but a few.

[72] Although Beowulf is not mentioned by name, he is referred to for the first time as *Higelāces þegn*, honour-bound to his lord and willing to fight on his behalf. In *Beowulf*, lines 194–201 the passage reads: *Þæt fram hām gefrægn Higelāces þegn / gōd mid Gēatum, Grendles dǣda, / se wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest / on þǣm dæge þysses līfes / æþele ond ēacen. Hēt him ȳðlidan / gōdne gegyrwan, cwæð, hē gūðcyning / ofer swanrāde sēcean wolde / mǣrne þēoden þā him wæs manna þearf*. Passage from B. Mitchell and F. Robinson (1998), *Beowulf. An Edition*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 55. 'That from home heard, Hygelac's thane, a good man of the Geats, of Grendel's deeds; he was mankind's greatest strength on that day in this life, noble and strong. He prepared a good wave-crosser for them. He said, the war-king over the swan-road he wished to seek, that mighty chief, since he was in need of men.'

battle of Raven's Wood, who goes with honour and out of duty to his family to rescue survivors of the battle.[73] John becomes even more crucial to the text and the audience relies on his remarks not only to provide images of Christ (and Satan), but also to progress the narrative. The Descent in itself is not the main theme; rather the act itself serves as a link to the baptismal message which is further fostered by John's words. Although Christ is more of a presence than a character, this presence is clearly influenced by the traditional heroic mode of depictions of Christ, and since He is represented as a faithful servant of God, Christ loyally performs His responsibilities, illustrating His compliance to God's will. This act must be accomplished before something greater can occur within the context of the fulfilment of scripture, and at the same time, within the framework of the poem's narrative. The poet employs the Germanic motif of loyalty and obedience to one's lord to emphasize an underlying Christian message. The burden of carrying the weight of the cross on Christ's shoulders has been lifted, but now after the implementation of bearing the burden of sin onto the rood, He silently, yet dutifully perseveres to conquer death. As exemplified by Christ's duty bound role, the audience becomes duty bound to their liege lord and prompted to respond to the baptismal and salvation message.

The effectiveness of Christ's depiction as a warrior is evident through glimpses we get of His character through John's words. Not only is the heroic motif re-emphasized in this way, but it gives us brief indications of His character, making His presence more comprehensible yet not necessarily clear. However vague and unclear, the clues given of Christ's image associate Him with the likeness of a loyal retainer, and with the glimpses of His character, the Anglo-Saxon audience is led on a journey of discovery. The representation of Christ as a mysterious figure adds to the overall riddling effect that dominates the poem as the poet encourages the audience to uncover the baptismal message within the narrative. The dichotomy between mystery and revelation provides an interesting parallel within the poem and allows the poet to maintain control of his audience. Christ's silence throughout is effective because His shadowy presence lends to wonder and intrigue, prompting a desire to uncover more about Him, whilst also exposing a clue about the poem's main theme.

The poet's word choice points to a carefully constructed text, exploiting the heroic language of the Anglo-Saxons' Germanic roots whilst interweaving the allusions with Christian concepts. The word-choice employed to describe Christ's actions is not accidental. The verbs *rēafian*, 'to plunder' or 'seize', *forbrecan*, 'to break' and *forbȳgan*, 'to destroy', evoke images of a warrior's actions during a battle-raid and reveal the strength behind Christ's action, as He takes

[73] See *Beowulf*, lines 2923–45. Shippey (1976), p. 40 points out that Christ's actions are humanized and reminiscent of Hygelac's. Hygelac seeks out and rescues survivors of the Battle of Raven's Wood even though he was not involved in the conflict, whilst similarly, Christ, although not involved in original sin, seeks out and rescues those suffering in Hell because He is bound by duty and honour.

back what is rightfully His Lord's.[74] The choice of words demonstrates the power behind the Prince's action, indicating that His mission was conducted with great force, whilst further evoking an image of a Germanic warrior seizing his booty. The choice of vocabulary is also reminiscent of I Thessalonians 5: 2, which reads: 'ipsi enim diligenter scitis quia dies Domini sicut fur in nocte ita veniet'.[75] Similarly in the poem's passage, Christ reveals Himself unexpectedly to Satan and robs him of what he believes he has rightfully acquired. Through this fusion of Christian and Germanic ideals of honour, loyalty and hierarchical ownership, Christ's mission goes beyond simply being a protective retainer; He is also a liberator of those whose rightful ownership belongs to God and whose rightful place belongs in Heaven.[76]

Conflict between Satan and Christ is commonly but not always exclusively emphasized in *descensus* accounts, and such tension would have certainly provided an excellent model to demonstrate the battle between good and evil lords.[77] However, the poet's choice to make Satan's character almost as minimal as Christ's reveals, again, that the main theme is something other than a retelling of the *descensus* in verse form. The lordless exile is a pathetic figure in Anglo-Saxon poetry, the symbol of the unwanted, and in Christianity, the image of a lost soul. The character of Satan in *John the Baptist's Prayer* is hardly mentioned in the poem, so not only does the lack of characterization demonstrate a desire to focus attention on something other than the war between the Devil and Christ, the scarcity of details surrounding Satan's character further emphasizes his existence as an outcast. The poet describes him as roaming *bið wīde fāh, / ne bið hē nō þæs nearwe under nīðloc[an / to] þæs bitre gebunden under bealuclommum* (lines 63–5). Here, the Devil is depicted as a wanderer, a treacherous outlaw, serving as the archetype of a retainer that an Anglo-Saxon would desire to distance himself from. As J. Brantley suggests

74 According to the *DOE* there are other parallels where the aforementioned verbs are used in connection with Germanic culture and battle scenes. *Rēafian* is used in *Beowulf* (line 2771) to describe a 'plundered' hoard at the end of Beowulf's final battle. In *Christ and Satan* (line 463) the same verbs *forbrecan* and *forbȳgan* (*forbræc* and *forbegde*) are used to describe Christ breaking the walls of Hell after defeating Satan. The *Thesaurus of Old English* indicates that one other definition for the verb *rēafian* is 'to clothe, provide with clothes'. Other synonyms for *forbrecan* include 'to destroy', 'shatter' and 'crush'. A search for synonyms of *forbegde*/*forbȳgan* using the *Thesaurus of Old English* produced no results.

75 'For you know very well that the Lord's day will come like a thief in the night.'

76 Native Anglo-Saxon literary motifs and forms influenced the descriptions of Heaven and Hell found in Old English poetry. Whereas Hell is the fortified domain of Satan and his relationship as chieftain is maintained by his faithful demonic followers, Heaven is Christ's stronghold, guarded and operated by His angelic host of noble thanes. For an excellent source providing examples of all stock poetry relating to Heaven and Hell see H. Tristam (1976), 'Stock Descriptions of Heaven and Hell in Old English Prose and Poetry', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 75, 102–13. Among the stock examples in Old English poetry, not one example exists within *John the Baptist's Prayer*. This is not to suggest that every Anglo-Saxon poem dealing with the *descensus* motif contained an element or version of the examples provided by Tristam, although the pattern does demonstrate that there were familiar criteria of the dichotomy between Heaven and Hell by the tenth century in Anglo-Saxon England.

77 A prime example of a *descensus* account in which the conflict between Christ and Satan is not emphasized is in the Old English *Christ I* poem. Although the Harrowing is described in great detail, the focus remains on Christ's victory over death and the response of the captives in Hell.

'the very appropriateness of the Devil to heroic ways of thought "outlaws" him from representation in this poem'.[78] Conjuring an image of Satan that would make him despised would encourage the audience to further disassociate themselves from connecting and sympathizing with his character, whilst also urging the audience to follow Christ and undergo baptism.[79] The battle in the poem is not between Satan and Christ, since the Devil is not even present in Hell when Christ descends. What is suggested then is that the battle is between the Devil and humanity. However, taking action through the sacrament of baptism will impede the Enemy's attack.

There is evidence in both prose and poetry that there was nothing worse than the perpetual shame and disgrace that followed a retainer who betrayed his lord in an act of disloyalty.[80] Exploring Christ's and Satan's representations in *John the Baptist's Prayer* reveals an interesting parallel at work. As White suggests:

> The Christian tradition of the origin and nature of Satan finds convenient means of expression in the ideals expressed in the comitatus relationship. Satan is conceived of as evil primarily because of his disloyalty; he violated the relationship of retainer to chieftain. In Hebraic-Christian tradition, Satan originally was the chief of angels in Heaven, subordinate only to Christ the Son of God. His duty, therefore, to God was that of a retainer or thane; but he was not content in this position, and because of his pride and ambition he rebelled against his lord and was expelled from Heaven and cast into a place prepared for him . . . Because of the punishment inflicted upon him by God, Satan is now completely given over to the attempts to thwart God, especially in his relationship to man.[81]

Harmonizing Christian motifs with Germanic ideas was easily appreciated by Anglo-Saxon audiences and did not disagree with conventional social attitudes, so since Satan, as *bona* (line 88), was established as a chieftain over his evil forces, who at the same time wanders as an exile, Christ, on the other hand, is a valiant soldier honoring the Supreme Lord who remains loyal in duty and has security in His permanent Heavenly residence. By clearly distinguishing between a disinherited traitor and a loyal vassal whose security is assured, an Anglo-Saxon audience would have a clear indication of which character to support and align themselves with. This fusion of Christian imagery and heroic diction, therefore, provides a recognizable method of conveying faithfulness which essentially prompts greater audience understanding.

In *John the Baptist's Prayer*, while Satan's character alone embodies the qualities of a disloyal retainer, the poet constructs strong models of trustworthy vassals, not only in his representation of Christ, but also through John. In a society where risk of conflict between loyalty to one's lord and honour to family was possible, the Germanic principle of loyalty could be supported by the Christian ideology of faithfulness to counter potential tension regarding

78 J. Brantley (1999), 'Iconography of the Utrecht Psalter and the Old English *Descent into Hell*', *Anglo-Saxon England* 28, 48.
79 See Ch. 3, pp. 89 and 99–103 for further discussion of the audience's role within the poem.
80 A select list of examples of disgraced and exiled retainers is provided in n. 102 of this chapter.
81 White (1959), p. 133.

loyalty. Since the Church 'had direct influence in shaping the concept that duty to one's lord should take precedence over duty to kinsman',[82] and all Christians had a duty to be loyal to God, the poem demonstrates this concept through John. Fulfilling his duties, John reveals himself to be a loyal servant of *dryhten Crist* (line 108). In turn, the poet presents the audience with a solution to any confusion over one's allegiance, since John demonstrates an acute obedience and loyalty to the *rīce dryhten* (line 116). Any lord going into battle would have needed their vassals' response to be supportive and compliant to a military appeal, and in a similar fashion, John answers Christ's call to arms with obedience and enthusiasm. Exemplifying the behaviour of a devoted retainer, John enthusiastically exclaims that *hæfde [him] gehāten hælend ūser / þā hē mē on þisne sīð sendan wolde / [and] þæt hē [him] gesōht[e ymb s]iex mōnað* (lines 26–8).[83] Blending Germanic and scriptural allusions together, this episode with the vassal John parallels the biblical story in which he foretells the Messiah's Coming to earth.[84] As for the issue of time, Trask suggests that time 'must relate to a symmetry in which John preceded Christ into both the earthly world and the lower world by a half-year'.[85] Since Christ's duty had not yet been fully realized, John's duty continues in Hell and the faithful vassal stands guard at Hell's gates, not only heralding Christ's coming, but positioning himself to follow his Lord first, and lead the Ancient Just out of Hell.

Heroic imagery continues with John's description of himself, who, unlike Christ, is fully equipped in preparation for the next phase in the redemption story. John explains that he has undergone a great deal *siþþan [Christ] end tō [him] in sīþadest, / þā [the Lord] [John] gesealdest sweord ond byrnan, / helm ond heorosceorp, ā ic þæt hēold nū gīet* (lines 71–3). This armour may have no direct biblical parallel, but it does suggest spiritual protection and echoes the passage in St Paul's writings calling on Christians to equip themselves with spiritual armour to protect themselves against attacks by Satan.[86] Further to this reflection

[82] Ibid.

[83] Although line 28b contains a lacuna and part of the line is missing, there is enough evidence to suggest that *-e ymb s-* are the missing letters. See Commentary on line 28 for further discussion on the reconstruction.

[84] See Matt. 3: 11, Mark 1: 7, Luke 3: 16, John 1: 27.

[85] Trask (1971), p. 426. Trask suggests that biblical specification of the time of Christ's and John's birth is relative; however, Trask further contends that the poet might simply have been making a parallel between the timing between their births and perhaps their deaths. Holthausen (1908), p. 50, cites only the authority of the poem for the six-month interval before Christ's visitation: 'Johannes war doch nach Luk. 1, 26 und 36 nur ein halbes jahr älter als Jesus und befand sich nach v. 28 des gedichtes erst seit sechs monaten in der vorhölle!' Grein measures the timeline between John's and Christ's deaths to be seven and a half months: 'Johannis decollation fällt auf den 29. August; zwischen diesem und dem nächstfolgenden Ostermontag (April) liegen [und] volle Monate'. C. W. M. Grein (1857–9), *Dichtungen der Angelsachsen stabreimend übersetzt*, 2nd ed. V.II. Göttingen: G. H. Wigand, pp. 420–1. See also Ch. 4, pp. 106–7.

[86] In Eph. 6: 11–17, St Paul states that 'induite vos arma Dei ut possitis stare adversus insidias diaboli, quia non est nobis conluctatio adversus carnem et sanguinem sed adversus principes et potestates adversus mundi rectores tenebrarum harum contra spiritualia nequitiae in caelestibus propterea accipite armaturam Dei ut possitis resistere in die malo et omnibus perfectis stare state ergo succincti lumbos vestros in veritate et induti loricam iustitiae et calciati pedes in praeparatione evangelii pacis in omnibus sumentes scutum fidei in quo

of the biblical passage, there is evidence of an underlying legendary source for the reference to John's armour found in *Blickling Homily XIV*, which at the very least provides an indirect connection with the allusion to John's armour in *John the Baptist's Prayer*.[87] The Blickling homilist recounts the story of John leaping in his mother's womb and states:

> Eala men þa leofoston, hu þæt wæs weallende spelboda & ungeþyldig heretoga, se þe ær þone Hælend on þysne middangeard cumendne gesecgean wolde, ærþon þe he þære gerynelican gegaderunge menniscre gebyrde ofenge; & he ær to þam cyninge becom & wæpn gegrap mid to campienne, ærþon þe he to his lichoma(n) leomum become.[88]

Although there would have been no need for John's armour in a literal sense, the weapons and armour that he possesses function on a purely symbolic level. As it was the duty of the retainers to fight for their lord, so it was equally a lord's duty to provide for the welfare and comfort of his followers. As White explains 'in return for their allegiance, the men expected gifts of horses and war gear and precious metals',[89] and this element of Germanic life finds expression in *John the Baptist's Prayer* as John is bestowed with weapons

possitis omnia tela nequissimi ignea extinguere et galeam salutis adsumite et gladium Spiritus quod est verbum Dei.' ('Put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and power, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. Therefore take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of justice, And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: In all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God).') For further discussion of the reference to John's armour see T. N. Hall (2008), 'The Armaments of John the Baptist in *Blickling Homily XIV* and the *Exeter Book Descent into Hell*', in *Intertexts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Paul E. Szarmach*, ed. V. Blanton and S. Helene. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, pp. 289–306.

87 R. Morris (1967), *The Blickling Homilies*. EETS os 58, 63 and 73. London: N. Trübner & Co. See especially *Blickling Homily XIV*, pp. 161–70. See also M. Förster (1906), 'Altenglische Predigtquellen I', *Archiv* 116, pp. 301 ff. Förster first suggested that the source for the homily could be traced to a Latin sermon passing under Augustine's name which was eventually elaborated on in the Book of Cerne. Crotty (1939) first made this connection and further explained that 'the narratives in the *Blickling Homily* and the *Book of Cerne* correspond so closely in this section that the incomplete text of the *Book of Cerne* can be pieced out from the Old English Homily' (p. 352). Apart from the *Blickling Homily* there have been no suggested sources in legend or historical documents for *John the Baptist's Prayer;* however, with the claim that the fourth-century Syrian homily composed for the festival of St John by a certain Serapion bears a striking resemblance to the passage dealing with John's armour in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, Crotty offers a possible direct source for the armour episode. For further discussion of the fourth-century homily see Crotty (1939), p. 355. See also Commentary on lines 69–78.

88 Morris (1967), pp. 165–7. 'Oh, dear men, what a zealous messenger and impatient leader he was who would first announce the Lord's Coming on this earth before he would attain to the mysterious formation of the natural birth; and he first became a king and grabbed a weapon in which to fight before he was become with bodily limbs.' Crotty reiterates that 'John is here represented as grasping weapons with which to fight, although, as this is connected with his receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, the weapons evidently are purely symbolic' (1939), p. 355.

89 White (1959), p. 127.

and armour.

Additionally, a Syrian homily about John the Baptist provides an account of John being equipped with camel's hair and a leather girdle sent from Heaven by God.[90] Mingana's translation of the episode reads:

> Immediately after, Gabriel, the head of the angels, came down to him from Heaven holding a raiment and a leathern girdle, and said to him, 'O Zacharias, take these and put them on our son. God sent them to him from Heaven. This raiment is that of Elijah and this girdle that of Elisha'. And the holy Zacharias took them from the angel, prayed over them and gave them to his son, and fastened on him the raiment which was of camel's hair with the leathern girdle.[91]

Similarly, the imagery of weaponry bestowed on John corresponds with his militant character in the *Blickling Homily VIII* where he is described as *wæpn gegrap mid to campienne*. In *John the Baptist's Prayer*, John is equipped with a *sweord ond byrnan, helm ond heorosceorp* (lines 72b–73a) which echoes the military allusions of the Syrian homily. However, the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* substitutes the 'raiment' and 'girdle' with weaponry that would suit an Anglo-Saxon warrior and would have been familiar to an Anglo-Saxon audience. In this way, the association to the comitatus society is revealed in the poem, as John is transformed into a thane whose liege lord, Christ, provides His retainer with weapons in exchange for loyal service. What Christ offers is more than just earthly protection though, He provides John with the promise of everlasting security in His Heavenly home. Although the action is dependent on Christ's entrance into Hell, the focus of the poem's narrative is on John and his service to His liege lord. Certainly, by heralding heroic imagery and presenting an image of John outfitted with the best weaponry and armour that his Lord offered would have presented Anglo-Saxon audiences with an inspiring depiction of John as an Anglo-Saxon warrior. Allegorically, the biblical allusions are also evident in the passage since there is indication that the armour is also representative of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.[92] Although there is a temptation to interpret John's words

[90] Two manuscripts containing the homily are entitled *Mingana Syrian*, nos. 22 and 183, and are housed in Rendel Harris Library, Birmingham. See A. Mingana (ed.) (1927), *Woodbrooke Studies. Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic and Garshūni. Edited and Translated with a Critical Apparatus by A. Mingana*. Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, pp. 138–45, 234–60.

[91] Ibid., p. 440.

[92] The complete gifts of the Holy Spirit are described in Rom. 12: 6–8, I. Cor. 12: 8–10, 28 and Eph. 4: 11. The connection between the armour and the gifts of the Holy Spirit comes from the Orthodox Christian concept of chrismation. The ritual involves granting of the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the anointing of oil, once a person is baptized. The custom completes the baptismal ritual. The passage of *John the Baptist's Prayer* suggests that John, having already been baptized, may have been equipped with the gifts of the Holy Spirit to assist him in his duty to ready the saints waiting in Hell. For scriptural support of the Apostolic view of John and chrismation see Acts 8: 14–18 and 19: 1–12. For further information on chrismation see *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Trask (1971), p. 421, contends that Eph. 6: 11 provides a simpler inference and reference to the armour than that of the Syrian homily. This sentiment is echoed by Shippey (1976), p. 41, who further claims that the passage is an allusion to Eph. 6: 13–17. See n. 86 of this chapter for a translation of the aforementioned scripture. I agree with Trask and Shippey's claim because there is insufficient proof to support the idea that the Syrian homily was a direct source for *John the Baptist's Prayer*. Still, there seems to be an allegorical level of meaning in regards to the gifts bestowed on John, and whether or not

in lines 70–1 as a reference to his murder, this passage is connected to the armour imagery which illustrates that John is not just given armour to protect his physical body; rather, he is bestowed with spiritual gifts to aid him in a spiritual battle waged on his soul. The allusion to John's receipt of the gifts of the Holy Spirit signifies the completion of the baptismal ritual and indicates that his soul will be protected.[93] Not only does John demonstrate that he adheres to the Germanic moral code of honour and loyalty which was central to the spirit of the Germanic comitatus society, but in the broader context, John is transformed into every man. Trask argues that 'Christ came to John as He comes, or can come, to every man in this world, providing weapons to fight the good fight and defenses to withstand the forces of evil. But even after Christ is experienced, suffering and hardship must be endured'.[94] In the same way that John, in the Enemy's territory, regains his courage with the sight and knowledge of the Descent and is able to stir the crowd in Hell, John, as representative of a faithful Anglo-Saxon warrior arouses an Anglo-Saxon audience to the idea that they should equip themselves with spiritual armour and be ready for attacks from Satan and his devilish foot soldiers.

As J. Anderson contends, 'beyond mere scattered words though, the whole of [the poem] can be seen as riddling in various ways on the unique kinship of Christ and John, not only in blood but also in deed'.[95] On a larger scale, the blending of Christian themes with Germanic language and motifs embodies the fusion of Germanic and Christian traditions that permeated not only the literature but life too in Anglo-Saxon society. There has been some confusion over the number of speakers and who they might be, as some scholars have noted that the speaker, 'chief among the fortress' inhabitants who is summoned to speak to his kinsman', must be Adam.[96] Since John is described immediately before the second speech that starts at line 59, Dobbie suggests that the phrase *burgwarena ord* at line 56 must refer to Adam, since Adam is the founder of the race. However, as Anderson suggests the key words being *ord*, 'point', 'beginning' or 'chief' and *mǣge*, 'kinsman' in line 57 have a semantic double

the poet may have known of the Syrian homily does not negate the fact that the layers of meaning are present in the poem.

93 *John the Baptist's Prayer*: *Ic ādrēag fela / siþþan þu end to me in sīþadest*.

94 Trask (1971), p. 429.

95 J. E. Anderson (1986), 'Dual Voices and the Identity of Speakers in the Exeter Book *Descent into Hell*', *Neophilologus* 70, 636–40, p. 637.

96 At this stage in the poem early scholars like Wülcker (1872), Kirkland (1885), p. 13, and Cramer (1897), pp. 163 and 172, indicate that John is the speaker. This interpretation is adopted by Mackie (1934), p. 157, and Crotty (1939), pp. 356–8, as well as more recent critics like Shippey (1976), p. 40, Kaske (1976), pp. 47–59, Trask (1971), pp. 420–2, Conner (1980), Anderson (1986) p. 637, Hieatt (1990), pp. 435–6, and Hall (1985). On the other hand, Holthausen (1908), pp. 49–53, *ASPR* III, p. lxii, Brantley (1999), pp. 47–8, n. 15, and Wrenn (1967), p. 156, all argue that Adam is the speaker. Greenfield (1965), p. 141, and Hill (1972), p. 388, argue that the speaker could be either Adam or John. See also K. Malone (1948), *A Literary History of England*, vol. 1, ed. A. C. Baugh. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. Malone, p. 80, introduces a new interpretation, suggesting that the poem is incomplete and that the scribe skipped a number of lines which introduce a speaker who supports John's plea of baptism. David is also suggested as the second speaker in the text, although this proposal has been rightly refuted. See also Commentary on line 56.

meaning that provides a riddling effect.[97] As the first created man, Adam might be the original *ord*, although from a militaristic perspective, *ord* could also suggest that the speaker was the 'frontman' or 'point man' of the battle formation.[98] The poem's 'frontman' was evidently poised to follow his horse-mounted liege lord, the *cyning in ōþrād* (line 40) (see Fig. 1) and lead the ranks of patriarchs out of Hell.

Ord can also refer to John who was born just before Christ and would technically be the last of the Old Testament figures to enter Hell, making him the closest to the gate or 'first' to meet Christ upon His Descent. Unlike Adam, the first man, who is Christ's kinsman through distant ancestry, John is Christ's contemporary blood-relative and commonly referred to as His forerunner. Although the epithet is vague and seems to point to two possible speakers with its twofold meaning, the speaker is clearly one whose active participation and role is still vital to the narrative and one whose message is consistent with the poem's storyline. As Christ's forerunner on earth, John continues his role as Christ's herald since His mission is yet to be fully accomplished. Since the poet has already identified John and established him as a loyal retainer equipped with armour and readied for a battle, it is not necessary to mention his name again as he continues his speech upon Christ's arrival in Hell. Thus, the poet employs the epithet *burgwarena ord* as a poetic device identifying John's connection to Christ while also emphasizing the saint's physical position in Hell.[99] As Anderson suggests, *ord* 'permits a semantic turnabout of "first" much in the manner of the well-known scriptural paradox'[100] in Matthew 20: 16 which reads 'pauci autem electi'.[101] Taking Anderson's argument one step further, the duplicity lies not so much in *who* the speaker is, but *what* he represents. Essentially, any confusion over the likelihood that Adam is the first speaker and the one who initially greets Christ is negated by the fact that John is consistently presented as Christ's kinsman, ultimately revealing Him to be John's *mæge* in both scriptural and Germanic contexts.

Exile and the journey motif in the Germanic tradition was a significant concept within comitatus society and consequently developed as a dominant theme in Old English literature. Evidently, the material benefits between a lord and his retainer were far outweighed by the personal bonds and friendships

97 Paraphrased from Anderson (1986), p. 637.

98 As defined in Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, and *DOE*.

99 *Ord* also appears in a martial context in *Beowulf* and the late tenth or early eleventh-century poem *Battle of Maldon*, which is conventionally described as a first-hand account of the battle of 991. The *Maldon*-poet recounts the fight whilst focusing attention on the Anglo-Saxon earl Byrhtnoth and his thanes, who rallied against a Viking invasion. While in many ways propagandist in its embellishment, the poem describes the dynamics of warfare and highlights the glory of loyalty and the shame of unfaithfulness which is at the heart of the Anglo-Saxon heroic ethos. All instances of *ord* in both poems refer to a 'point' or 'spear'. Although the references in the two other poems do not refer to a person as the word *ord* does in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, the use of *ord* in poetry dominated by the heroic ethos indicates that the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* recognized its association with Germanic imagery. See *Beowulf*, lines 1549 and 2791 and *Battle of Maldon*, especially lines 47, 60, 69, 110, 146, 158 and 253.

100 Anderson (1986), p. 637.

101 The last portion of the verse from Matt. 20: 16, which states 'the last shall be first'.

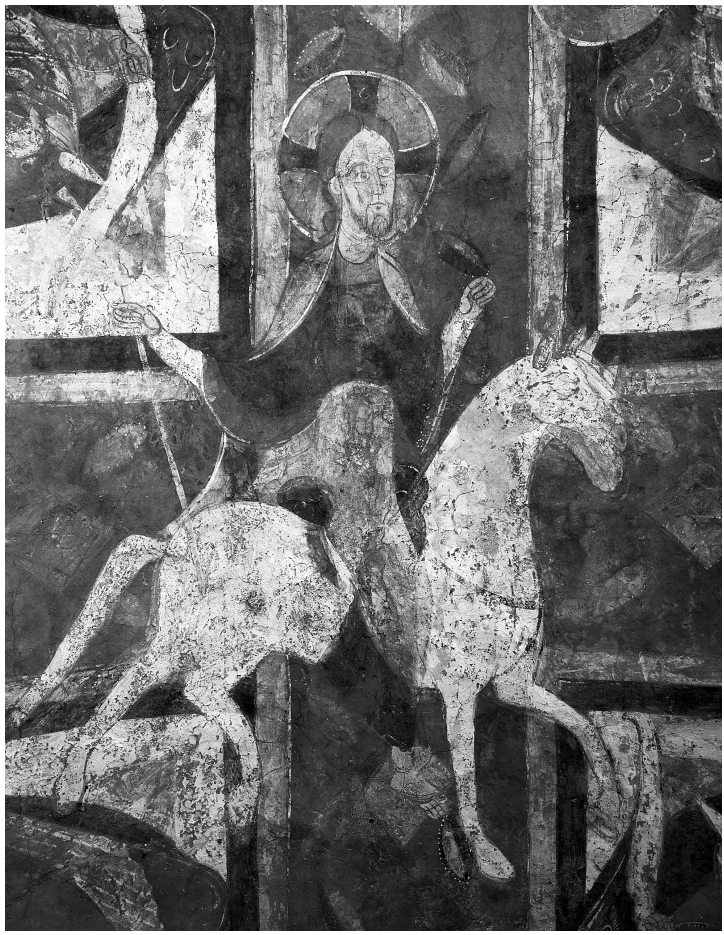


Fig. 1. Christ on a White Horse. This depiction is located in Auxerre Cathedral, France, and dates from *c.* 1150. This particular representation of Christ in His Majesty is extremely rare. He holds a sceptre in His right hand and lifts His left hand in a gesture of blessing. It conjures an image of Him as a heroic redeemer on the verge of descending to rescue the captives in Hell. Images of this kind became more prominent throughout the Middle Ages in depictions of the *descensus*. Selected examples of Christ presented as a heroic redeemer in later art can be found in the *Syriac Lectionary*, originating in Iraq, *c.* 1216–20 (BL, 7170); the English 'Harrowing of Hell' by Matthew Paris, *c.* 1240 (BL, Arundel 257, fol. 11); the Italian painting 'Descent into Hell' by Duccio di Buoninsegna, *c.* 1308–11 (located in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo); the French 'Book of Hours no. 2', *c.* 1330 (BL, 36684); The Dutch 'Book of Hours', *c.* 1430–1435 (The Hague, KB, 79 K2); and the Dutch 'Book of Hours', *c.* 1490 (The Hague, KB, 76.G16). This list of illustrations is only a small selection of hundreds of paintings, icons and carvings depicting a heroic Christ defeating Hell and saving its captives. Images capturing a heroic Christ on the verge of harrowing Hell were found all over Europe, Asia and Africa throughout the Middle Ages. The selection offered here indicates the popularity of the *descensus* amongst Christian artists around the world, and also the common manner of Christ's depiction in the scene. Photo reproduced with permission by Dea / G. Dagliorti / De Agostini / Getty Images.

that might develop. Tragic echoes of an individual's painful torment and sorrow upon losing his lord feature in much Anglo-Saxon literature. Exile is exemplified notably in Old English poems through a wife in the *Wife's Lament*, *Genesis*'s Cain, the king in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the Satan character in *Christ and Satan*, a wanderer of the sea in the *Seafarer*, demons in *Juliana* and *Guthlac*, and a lordless thane in *Fates of the Apostles*, to name a few.[102] In *John the Baptist's Prayer*, the saints who wait in Hell are exiled from their Lord and John articulates their distress with poignant clarity. He exclaims (lines 88b–96a):

> Bona weorces gefeah;
> wǽron ūre ealdfīnd ealle on wynnum
> þonne hȳ gehȳrdon hu we hrēowen[de
> mǽnd]on murnende mǽgburg usse,
> oþþæt . . . . sigedryhten god,
> bimengdes[t] . . . .
> . . . . modi]gast ealra cyninga.
> . . . . . Nu us mon mōdge þē
> āgēaf from usse geōgoðe. We þurh gīfre mōd
> beswīcan us sylfe . . .

Although damage has corrupted the lines containing part of John's explanation of the suffering in the Underworld, enough of the lines remain to understand the agony, not simply of the collective agony of being in Hell, but additionally the misery experienced from retainers being exiled from their Lord. This prolonged wandering in Hell and longing for their new homeland is reminiscent of the Anglo-Saxon individual's fear of being exiled from his liege-lord. The separation is only temporary for John and the Saints, and there is no indication in the poem that the poet was suggesting that they, in any way, betrayed their leader, although they *[mǽnd]on, murnende, mǽgburg* [*heore*] (line 90), repenting as a result. Whether it be a saint or the common man, it is sin that separates one from God, and this weakness in man bears much in common with a disloyal retainer. As Shippey explains ' the poet lets John generalize his experience at one point in what is almost a gnomic statement (lines 62–8): that when enemies tie up the friendless and persecuted exile, he can always regain his courage by thinking of his lord's favour'.[103] This remark is true even in a secular sense; in using it the poet reinforces his image of the Saviour, honour-bound to his kinsmen and followers. It is also true of the Patriarchs' experience while further reflecting on the doubtful and despairing souls within any age. Through this passage, the poet places a common anxiety from a Germanic motif into the mouth of his main speaker in an attempt to demonstrate that without Christ's redemption every soul is in a temporary state of exile. Within the larger context of where the poem sits within the Exeter Book, it is no coincidence then, that *John the Baptist's Prayer*

[102] See *Wife's Lament*, lines 9–10a; *Genesis*, lines 1049b–1051a; *Wulf and Eadwacer*, lines 4, 9, 13–15; *Christ and Satan*, lines 119–121a; *Seafarer*, lines 14–16, 37b–38; *Juliana*, lines 389b–390; *Guthlac*, lines 1353b–1354a; and *Fates of the Apostles*, lines 109b–111a.

[103] Shippey (1976), p. 43.

is nestled amongst poems that deal with prayer, contrition and the soul.[104] Consequently, the poem 'might seem a particularly unlikely poem in which to find gnomic or prophetic elements, since the event itself is intrinsically a happy one and one furthermore unaffected by the exercise of human wisdom'.[105] However, the poet's incorporation of traditional Germanic themes which within a Christian setting allows him to fashion the poem in a contemplative manner draws heavily on the anxieties and fears aroused in the prospect of being eternally exiled and demonstrates that the offer of salvation extends to all of humanity.

Beyond a mere scattering of Germanic words and allusions, the poem offers a highly developed Christian narrative harmonized with images inherited from the Anglo-Saxon's pagan past. These elements representing the heroic ethos would have connected with an Anglo-Saxon audience, whilst fostering the religious message at the heart of the poem. In fusing secular and spiritual values the poet emphasizes the concepts of loyalty and exile, whilst his use of heroic diction aids in understanding that the *descensus* itself, is not the main theme in the poem. The interaction of ideas is not in conflict, rather they complement each other and demonstrate a sophisticated artistry on the part of the poet which surely must have appealed to Christian converts in Anglo-Saxon England. Much of Christ's testimony in the New Testament emphasizes concepts like humility and forgiveness, which would have been strangely foreign to an Anglo-Saxon convert's preconceived perception of a hero. Christ's representation in *John the Baptist's Prayer* is described in recognizable heroic terms, however subdued His depiction is. In this way, the main emphasis of the poem straightforwardly focuses on John's words and deeds, as his representation of a faithful vassal cultivates the poem's main theme concerning the individual soul's spiritual journey towards baptism and salvation.

LITURGY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON *JOHN THE BAPTIST'S PRAYER*

Under King Edgar (r. 959–75), a code of monastic law, the *Regularis concordia*, had been constructed, and within one hundred years, enough 'codicological and linguistic evidence [exists to] suggest that Exeter in Leofric's time (1050–72) was the place where liturgical manuscripts (at least one) were written but also the place where the plan to insert liturgical rubrics into vernacular gospel manuscript originated'.[106] At the time of Leofric's death in 1072, he had

[104] For further discussion of the poem's place within the Exeter Book see pp. 58–9 and Ch. 1, n. 18.

[105] Shippey (1976), p. 43.

[106] U. Lenker (2005), 'The Rites and Ministries of the Canons', in *The Liturgy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. H. Gittos and M. B. Bedingfield. London: Henry Bradshaw Society, p. 205. For further discussions of a scriptorium in Exeter during Leofric's time see F. Barlow, *Leofric of Exeter*; F. Barlow (1979), *The English Church; 1000–1066: A History of the Later Anglo-Saxon Church*. 2nd ed. London: Longman; and H. R. Loyn (2000), *The English Church: 940–1154*. London: Longman. For further discussion on liturgy in Anglo-Saxon England see Bedingfield (2002). See also C.

established the foundation for the cathedral library, furnishing it with sixty-six books of which thirty-one were liturgical texts.[107] Upon consideration of the amount of surviving Old English texts, whether prose or poetry, a significant amount of what has come down to us is liturgical in nature, in theme, or by the fact that it contains liturgical elements in some capacity.[108] As the number of surviving liturgical texts suggests a rich presence of liturgical practices being observed in Anglo-Saxon England during the latter half of the tenth century, there is little surprise that there is liturgical influence in many Old English poems. Although it is not always clear what the primary function of some Old English poems was, the liturgical content and its context within Old English poetry can be treated with some certainty; to this effect, *John the Baptist's Prayer* has not gone completely overlooked in relation to this.[109]

Because the events of the Passion are central to Christianity, it is no surprise that liturgical commemoration of Christ's death and Resurrection dominated rituals, festivals and other traditional modes of worship within the Christian calendar. What is known of the Easter Liturgy in late Anglo-Saxon England is that the 'Church was quite interested in the dramatic re-enactment of the events of this holiest of times'.[110] The dramatic associations with the women's long, sorrowful journey to the tomb, or the Hell-dwellers waiting in the darkness of Hell for Christ's light, as well as the theatricality involved in the freeing of the Hell-dwellers, give a strong indication of the liturgical influence on the poem and the conspicuous manner in which Anglo-Saxon audiences commemorated the Passion. With this evidence of dramatic elements in mind, the liturgical framework within which *John the Baptist's Prayer* was written is difficult to miss since the events in the poem explicitly develop over

Cubitt (1995), *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c. 650–c. 850*. London: Leicester University Press, pp. 125–47; S. Foot (1992), 'By Water in the Spirit: The Administration of Baptism in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. J. Blair and R. Sharpe. Leicester: Leicester University Press, pp. 171–92; C. A. Jones (1998), 'The Book of the Liturgy in Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum* 73, 659–702. See also the entries in R. Pfaff (ed.) (1995), *The Liturgical Books of Anglo-Saxon England*. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications; and R. Pfaff (2009), *The Liturgy in Medieval England. A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 30–53. Further to these resources see D. Dumville (1992), *Liturgy and the Ecclesiastical History of Late Anglo-Saxon England*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press. As Dumville explains, 'Alfred authorized a programme for ecclesiastical revival which required vigorous patronage and was dependent on the existence of the scriptorium at the royal court' (p. 141). Since *John the Baptist's Prayer* dates back to at least the tenth century, it may have been created as a result of the influence of Alfred's ecclesiastical reform.

107 For a list of the liturgical texts left in Exeter by Leofric see S. Rankin (1984), 'From Memory to Record: Musical Notations in Manuscripts in Exeter', *Anglo-Saxon England* 14, 101–12. See also M. Lapidge (1985), 'Surviving Booklists from Anglo-Saxon England', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 65–9.

108 I am not suggesting that *John the Baptist's Prayer* originated in Exeter as a result of the liturgical influence in the city during the twelfth century, especially since the poem can be dated to at least the tenth century, thus becoming part of the Exeter Book that was presented to Leofric. It is still worthwhile to note that there were a large number of liturgical texts in Exeter.

109 See Cook (1900, repr. 1964), pp. 71–2. For a detailed discussion of the poem's structural parallels to the liturgy of Holy Saturday see Conner (1980), pp. 179–91.

110 Bedingfield (2002), p. 115.

the early hours of Holy Saturday. Thus, as the women set out *to geonge* in line 2, readers begin a spiritual *sīð* themselves.[111] The poem's structure follows the repetition of antiphonal passages that would be repeated before and after the Magnificat, thus presenting a possible source for the poem.[112]

Bedingfield states that 'the point of the commemoration has always been to unite the celebrants with the saving events of Christ's Passion and Resurrection',[113] thus by participating in the public re-enactment of the climactic events of Easter weekend and experiencing the emotions involved in the Passion, Anglo-Saxons could better understand the value of Christ's death and Resurrection. It is striking that although the liturgy of the time was 'inherently conservative',[114] as H. Gittos argues, the poet fuses liturgical elements with the reworking of the *descensus* story, thus creating a seductive poem summoning listeners on a journey towards salvation. The structure of the poem can be read as a series of antiphons reminiscent of liturgical compartments assembled together in a manner that develops the poem's narrative.[115] Although the poem was written before established liturgical drama was in effect, there are strong ties between the way liturgy was being practised and the way that the poem was written. As Bedingfield claims, the late tenth century saw the initial shift towards Easter-plays; however, the 'development of ceremonies was not interested in a logical sequence based on cause and effect or a unity of time, but rather in strengthening the faith of the congregation by giving them proof of Christ's Resurrection'.[116] Bedingfield's assertion might assist in explaining the poem's non-traditional arrangement of events, as the poem's abrupt beginning and subsequent departure from a linear sequence of events reflect how it functions on a pedagogical level, emphasizing the theme of baptism through illusions,

111 Lines 1–3 and lines 14–15a explicitly state that the women began their journey in the early hours of the morning on Easter Eve, and in a similar manner, lines 17–23 suggest that Christ's Descent into Hell occurs simultaneously with the women's commencement of their journey. The exact day on which Christ descended has troubled many scholars, and whether the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* was aware of opposing theories concerning the exact day of Christ's Descent is uncertain. However, the poet is seemingly unconcerned with the exact time of the Harrowing. His straightforward approach in declaring that the *descensus* occurred on Saturday morning while quickly drawing attention to the scene in Hell further emphasizes that the poet's central theme is neither intended to deal with the actual Descent or the particulars involved in competing ideas relating to the exact time in which the event initially occurred.

112 Occupying an important place in the liturgy of the Church since the fourth century, the Magnificat is a canticle taken from the Gospel of Luke 1: 46–55, where the events of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth are recorded.

113 Bedingfield (2002), p. 114.

114 H. Gittos (2005), 'Introduction', in *The Liturgy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. H. Gittos and M. B. Bedingfield. London: Henry Bradshaw Society, p. 2.

115 The first fifty-five lines of the poem can be read as the Service of Light, followed by the *Deo gratias* in line 59a. Lines 76–106 echo the liturgical readings from the baptismal service, while the *Exultet* resonates in lines 107–35. The liturgical *Deo gratias* repeats again in line 137b. The liturgical components of the poem are discussed in detail in this chapter, pp. 84–91 and in Appendix 3, pp. 200–1.

116 M. B. Bedingfield (2005), 'Ritual and Drama in Anglo-Saxon England: The Dangers of the Diachronic Perspective', in *The Liturgy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. H. Gittos and M. B. Bedingfield. London: Henry Bradshaw Society, p. 296.

words and the poem's structure.[117] Since no other accounts of the *descensus* develop with an introductory episode involving the women's journey to the tomb, there seems to be little connection between the opening sequence and the following episode involving the actual Harrowing. Why was the poem written in such a peculiar way? Since this seemingly troubling issue regarding the poem's structure and curious juxtaposition between the mourning women and the actual Harrowing is orphaned from other textual sources dealing with the *descensus*, recognizing the liturgical pattern in the poem gives some elucidation of the poem's somewhat puzzling structure.[118] Comprising a little more than a third of *John the Baptist's Prayer*, the first fifty-five lines concentrating on the women's sorrowful journey to the sepulchre juxtaposing Christ's entrance into Hell can be read as a recreation of the Service of Light. This service involves a dramatic rite called the 'Lucernarium', where a priest strikes a fire from flint and uses the fire to light a paschal candle which is blessed and carried through the nave of the church and from which all other candles in the church are lit.[119] It is important to note that I am referring here to the Eastertide liturgy in the Western tradition, since Anglo-Saxon England fell under its jurisdiction. The Eastern Orthodox tradition of the Service of Light makes use of John's Chrysostom's *Paschal Homily* that addresses the Harrowing. This tradition includes greater attention to colours in ceremonial details. Clergy vestments and church drapery are usually dark purple or black, reflecting a sombre mood, then just before the Gospel reading, the colours are changed to white, signifying Christ's light. A censing is performed and laurel leaves are strewn around the church to celebrate the Harrowing of Hell and reflect the anticipation of Christ's pending Resurrection. Although colours do not feature in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, light is prominently associated with Christ's entrance into Hell, thus signalling in liturgical fashion the moment in which a priest could enter the Church with a lit candle.

As the poem's prologue recalls the *quem quaeritis* trope, these first sixteen lines of the poem echo an antiphon most suitable for the Easter Vigil and lines

[117] For a more detailed description of the chronology of Christ's redemptive work taken from patristic writers see Appendix 1. This non-traditional sequence of events became more common in literature, art and liturgy in Christendom of the later Middle Ages. For a detailed discussion of the uncommon arrangement of events in the poem and representations in art and literature of the later Middle Ages see Izydorczyk (1990), pp. 440–1.

[118] In *ASPR* III, the poem's structure was not even an issue as Krapp maintained that 'the poet's interest is not in an orderly and sequential narrative, but in a lyrical development of those aspects of his theme which lend themselves most readily to the lyric form' (p. lxii). See also Brantley (1999), who argues that although liturgy concerns itself more often with thematic associations rather than adhering to a precise chronological sequence of events, Paschal liturgy is very 'plot-driven' (pp. 53–4). It is important to emphasize that not every aspect of *John the Baptist's Prayer* is recognizably liturgical in nature, yet the overriding structure and tone is liturgical in temperament, and acknowledging the fluidity of liturgy in general further demonstrates the liturgical influence on the Old English poem. See also Campbell (1982), p. 150, and Crotty (1936), p. 356, for passing remarks on the shift in tone from narrative to lyrical.

[119] The symbolism behind the act of clashing flint together and creating a new fire reflects Christ's Resurrection as he leaps from the rocky tomb. Likewise as the candlelight spreads, the light of Christ spreads and devours the darkness. For a complete description of the Easter liturgy throughout Holy Week in Anglo-Saxon England see Bedingfield (2002), pp. 90–170.

17–55 reflect Christ's coming, as represented in the Service of Light in which Christ brings light to pierce the darkness of Hell.[120] Following this episode, lines 50–55a read:

> Gesēah þā Iohannis sigebearn godes
> mid þȳ cyneþrymme cuman tō helle.
> Ongeat þā gēomormōd godes sylfes sīð.
> Gesēah hē helle duru hædre scīnan,
> þā þē longe ǣr bilōcen wǣron,
> beþeahte mid þȳstre.

The coming of light into the darkness of Hell is a common image in the *descensus* narrative, and while the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* does not necessarily linger on the image of Christ's Descent, the poet ensures that one of the central images of the Easter Vigil, involving light breaking through darkness, is duly included. As witnessed by John, the subtle, yet powerful image of Christ piercing the darkness is a reminder to the Patriarchs in Hell, as well as those assembled in a Service of Light, of the promise of redemption brought through the light which manifests through Christ's divinity.[121]

Following the Service of Light antiphon, the remainder of the poem finds its root in the baptismal service, with much of the remaining lines given to John's monologue.[122] Similar to the method in which a priest praises and thanks Christ in a blessing of the font before the Litany, so too the words of John echo an analogous supplication of extolment and gratitude for Christ's

120 Kirkland (1885), p. 12, suggests that the prologue's source is Matt. 28: 1: 'Vespere autem sabbati quae lucescit in prima sabbati: venit Maria Magdalene, et altera Maria, videre sepulcrum, alleluia'. Kirkland cites Mark and Luke for lines 16–23, which he claims are also part of the prologue. Cramer (1897), pp. 138–9, on the other hand, argues that the poet was using an Easter tradition that drew from all four Gospels so any influence that Matthew may have on the first fifteen lines is fortuitous. Conner (1980) quite rightly points out that within the prologue consisting of the first sixteen lines of the poem 'it is demonstrable that the *Vespere autem* antiphon used before and after the Magnificat at the end of the Holy Saturday Mass and in the Vigil of the Resurrection is a more likely immediate source, considering the context of the poem as a whole' (p. 181). Connor notes that the *quem quaeritis* trope consists of Mary, the mother of James and Mary Magdalene approaching the tomb; all this together provides a traditional motif for the Resurrection (paraphrased from 181). For further discussion on this topic and others relating to medieval drama and liturgy see Hardison (1965), p. 166. Brantley (1999), pp. 50–2, argues that the sequence of events is somewhat troubling and that the connection between the introductory setting involving the women's journey to the tomb and its liturgical connection is not completely convincing. In that respect, I disagree because their process of loss and mourning emphasizes the emptiness without Christ, yet, as they will find something unexpected when they reach the tomb, readers come to an unexpected turnabout through the liturgical escape which offers baptism and ultimately, a new hope. There should not be any issues of concern that the sequence of events is untraditional or that there is not a single model for the text, since evidence suggests that the poem is more than a poetic rendition of the *descensus* narrative. It is more vital to understand that the poet's direction is focused on the subjects of redemption and salvation through liturgy and echoes of baptism.

121 See Ch. 2, n. 16.

122 The baptismal service includes a series of readings from the Prophets who foretold of Christ's Resurrection followed by the recitation of the Litany of the Saints in which the soul will join company with those baptized. The service further involves the blessing of the font and water followed by initiation into Christianity through the act of baptism.

coming and presence.[123] A series of apostrophes follow in lines 76–105 which are consistent with a succession of readings from the Prophets that convey the events in Christ's life that led to His baptism.[124] What is evident in the apostrophes is the progression from a distant voice speaking of historical events to a liturgical response in which John's declaration to the Jordan imparts a present reality on behalf of every man. As Trask states: 'perhaps it may be said that in the apostrophes of the second half of the poem, John as a character begins increasingly to merge into the voice of the poem . . . [thus] the speaker testifies for all faithful Christians'.[125] If we accept that 'faithful' Anglo-Saxons had Trask's claim in mind, the audience would have empathized with John, joining him in Hell and readying themselves for the moment of redemption.

Following the apostrophes, the liturgical quality of the poem continues throughout, as lines 107–35 resonate like the 'Exultet' with John's clearly articulated prayer of praise and thanksgiving to Christ.[126] Since the 'Exultet' is usually sung by either a deacon, priest or cantor, it seems fitting then that the prayer in lines 107–35 resonates through John because of the bond he shares with Christ, both in kinship and in mission.[127] As the poem comes to a close, lines 135–7 echo a typical reader/respondent rite associated with the baptismal sacrament, as the narrator chimes in saying: *swylce git Iohannis in Iordane / mid þȳ fullwihte fægre onbryrdon / ealne þisne middangeard* (lines 133–137a). The closing passage circles back to the third and fourth apostrophes which are clear references to Christ's death, Resurrection and baptism. The concluding lines allude to a wider standpoint inclusive of the poem's audience. The final voice is in the present tense, openly stating that Jerusalem must now *bīdan* Christ's return again (line 129). This passage has a liturgical ring to it as the final speaker includes his audience in his final exhortation. Thus through this inclusion, the narrator speaks on behalf of all humanity urging the audience to recognize the redemption message. Just as Christ was inspiring in His mission, the poem's conclusion is set within the wider context of providential history suggesting that Christ still is inspiring to all believers, and that baptism is the means in which to achieve harmony with God. With this invitation to be baptized it is possible that respondents might declare *sīe þæs symle meotude þonc* (line 137b). Brantley summarizes the closing passage as follows:

123 The parallel between John's monologue and the priest's blessing of the font previous to the litany was first proposed by Conner (1980), p. 180.

124 These prophecies carry typological meaning constituting an overview of Christ's life and salvation. These readings commonly read on Easter morning include Gen. 1 and 2 (on creation); Gen. 22 (Abraham and Isaac); Ex. 14 and 15 (crossing the Red Sea); Isa. 54 (proclamation of God's love); Isa. 55 (exhortation to seek God); Bar. 3 and 4 (God's glory); Eze. 36 (prophecy on Israel); Rom. 6 (being baptized into Christ); and Luke 24: 1–21 (the discovery at the empty tomb). See C. E. Olson (2008), 'The Easter Triduum: Entering into the Paschal Mystery'. Catholic Education Resource Center. <http://catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/reo873.htm>. See also Isa. 43: 1–4, 6–7, 64: 1. For further discussion of typological connections concerning Easter and baptism see Ch. 4, pp. 108–12, 117 of this edition.

125 Trask (1971), pp. 429–30.

126 The 'Exultet' is a hymn of praise ritualistically sung by the deacon after the procession with the paschal candle.

127 See p. 81 of the current chapter.

> The polyphonic utterances in the [poem's] final verses . . . could be explained as a reflection of the poem's liturgical sensibility. The attribution of the poem's words to a speaker (the poet) outside the fictional narrative opens the possibility that the sentiment extends mimetically to the work's readers, as well. This slippage of voice can be likened to a liturgical model familiar from settings such as the 'Magnificat' and 'Nunc dimittis'.[128]

Regardless of whether the concluding two lines were meant to be read in a reader/respondent manner, the final declaration of praise and gratitude to Christ for the example He demonstrated through His own baptism not only presents closure to the poem, but also offers finality appropriate to the baptismal service ritual. Thus, the closing lines function as an open invitation to partake in the sacrament and offer a fitting end to the poem that exhibits strong ties to the Easter Liturgy. Further to this liturgical evidence within the poem, the dual pronoun *git* in line 135 makes it grammatically improbable that John was speaking about himself, and the slippage out of character points to a more general voice merging into a voice for all believers.[129] Conner suggests that *git* can be easily explained if one looks at it in a liturgical sense. He explains that

> Those who have tried to attribute all of the speeches in the poem to John in order to maintain the unity of the poem as it is centered about the baptism image have had to resort to ingenious but unlikely situations to explain these final lines which are too obviously oratorical to be attributed to a narrator. But given the context of the poem – that is, a liturgical tour de force based on major themes in the Easter Saturday ritual – the last five lines are easily explained.[130]

Indeed the final utterance in the last two lines of the poem encapsulates the poem's liturgical qualities. While the poem opens with the narrator offering his sole voice to relay an historical account, it concludes with that same narrator speaking communally with a shift in focus to liturgical time. Reflecting the Service of Light and the baptismal service celebrations exclusive to the Holy Saturday rites, the liturgy within the poem is strikingly noticeable as 'a conflation of material from the Mass and Divine Office of Holy Saturday',[131] and the celebratory invocations veiled in the liturgical structure bring methodical closure to these liturgical rites.

Ultimately, the Easter liturgy appears as a dominant feature within the poem, providing not only a convincing source for it, but also indicating how the poem may have functioned on a liturgical level. Within the structure of *John the Baptist's Prayer*, liturgy, invocation and song cannot be marginalized or considered to be of minor significance. The poem's associations with the style, structure and content of the Easter liturgy are not limited to metaphorical representation nor relegated to part of the narrative's backdrop; rather liturgy within *John the Baptist's Prayer* offers evidence of the poem's didactic function

128 Brantley (1999), p. 50. The 'Nunc dimittis' is a canticle by Simeon the devout Jew, taken from Luke 2: 29–32.
129 See Commentary at line 135 for further discussion of *git*.
130 Conner (1980), pp. 184–5.
131 Ibid. p. 180.

of imparting the concept of baptism during the paschal season. Considering the liturgical features gives a greater sense of the poem's structure, purpose and audience while accentuating the text's prime focus on salvation and baptism through the act of worship and supplication during Eastertide. It is deceptively tempting to read the introduction as a narrative; however, examining the poem's organization suggests a methodical and admirably balanced liturgical structure. If read with the Service of Light in mind, followed by John's prayer, the sequential apostrophes and the closing segment reminiscent of the baptismal service, the poem in its entirety utilizes the liturgical structure to signal an abandonment of the old life. Just as the scene on earth with the women is abandoned, and similarly like the Patriarchs' impending abandonment of Hell for a new home is inferred, exemplars of this kind are employed as liturgical indicators to suggest an escape from the transient life on earth, Hell and, death through the act of baptism. Although there are elements within the poem that do not completely comply with the liturgy, we must keep in mind that 'liturgy is not always solid, fixed and coherent . . . it is in a fairly constant state of flux, hard to capture in all its dimensions at any moment and changes in the hands that use it'.[132] Consequently, since the text's mode of expression manifests itself through heavy reliance on liturgical idioms, the curious rendering of the *descensus* theme becomes less ambiguous as the message of salvation through baptism emerges more clearly. With the understanding that liturgical influence rings throughout the entire poem, the main theme of baptism becomes even more strikingly obvious. Again it is important to emphasize that the poem warrants a more appropriate title and makes the change to *John the Baptist's Prayer* all the more necessary since the seemingly arbitrary current title does the poem little justice to understanding its structure and theme.

BAPTISM AND ITS THEMATIC SIGNIFICANCE

Since the influence of the Eastertide liturgy manifests itself so clearly throughout the poem, it comes as little surprise that the theme of baptism and associated imagery are strong forces in *John the Baptist's Prayer*. For such a seemingly minor poem in the corpus of Old English, an important theme in the text involves 'the very ritual by which Christians are made'.[133] In tenth-century England, baptism would play an essential role as a defining act whereupon a heathen became a Christian, which for the Anglo-Saxons was not simply essential for salvation but was a significant introduction into the Christian community.[134]

132 S. Rankin (2005), 'Making the Liturgy: Winchester Scribes and their Books', in *The Liturgy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. H. Gittos and M. B. Bedingfield. London: Henry Bradshaw Society, p. 51.

133 Bedingfield (2002), p. 171.

134 For an in-depth analysis of baptism in Anglo-Saxon England see Bedingfield (2002), pp. 171–90. In Ch. 7 Bedingfield explains the changes associated with the application of baptism

Since it is historically during the Easter vigil that people are baptized, it is fitting then that the first part of the poem describes what is essentially a despondent and lonely journey into the unknown. However, as the women were to discover something unforeseen on their pilgrimage, so too the poem's original audience follows along on a road to discovery. To aid the audience on this path, the poet skillfully weaves a number of baptismal references which hold the poem's fabric together, and without understanding the importance of the baptismal imagery and its function within the poem one is likely to misinterpret the poem and misunderstand the overriding theme.

The most obvious in the collection of baptismal references is the representation of the figure of John the Baptist himself. The poetic rendering of this version of events relies heavily on John as the principal speaker whose discourse to Christ is an appeal on behalf of the unbaptized saints in Hell as well as a petition for grace as a representative of all mankind.[135] In this manner, John, the one who is identified with baptism through his vital, participatory role involving Christ's induction into His ministry, by proxy is a representative for everyman. Just as Christ has come to John, so too, Christ will come to save humanity. It is John's character and the words he utters that justify Christ's Descent while at the same time emphasizing baptism; thus parallels are provided between dying to self and being reborn with the promise of eternal life.

As with the appropriateness of John's presence and role in a poem concentrating on the theme of baptism, other themes closely associated with this sacrament are central to the poem's main narrative. Elemental imagery signified through allusions to water and fire are frequent in baptismal imagery, so it is unsurprising that such references are recurrent within the poem. Statements associating birth and baptism are made through parallels between death and rebirth through baptism as the narrator emphasizes Christ's first example of dying to self and taking on God's mission as exemplified in His baptism in the Jordan.[136] In the closing lines of the poem, the narrator exclaims that *in Iordane / mid [his] fullwihte fægre onbryrdon / ealne þisne middangeard* (lines 135–137a). The poem's theme is clear with the inclusive statement stressing that Christ set the example of baptism for all mankind in which anyone could partake in the sacrament. As J. Daniélou contends, 'the water is both the baptismal water and the water of death, and the Descent and rising are allusions to the baptismal rite'.[137] The poet's control over the narrative and its particulars holds the key as to why Christ descends to Hell (without mention of the ascent and what correlation it has to the rest of the poem). With emphasis on how *cyning in oþrād* to Hell juxtaposing Christ's baptism in the Jordan in which he *in þære burnan baþodan* (line 40b), the poet skilfully connects the concept of

throughout the entire Anglo-Saxon period. Despite the changes in the application, the overriding purpose of baptism as a signifier of one's conversion to Christianity and initiation into the Christian community remained the same.

135 The version of events in the poem is a deviation from traditional versions of the *descensus* story, as discussed in Ch. 2 of this edition.

136 For biblical passages dealing with baptism by fire see Appendix 2, line 1.

137 J. Daniélou (1964), *A History of Early Christian Doctrine*. V.2. London: Westminster Press, p. 323.

the Descent with that of baptism. This act *onbryrdan*, as the speaker states, is essential to understanding what it means to be a Christian and serves as a lesson of Christ's entire mission to surrender Himself to God's service and be reborn as His instrument.

Further evidence of the baptismal theme comes with reference to the Jordan because of its association with the sacramental act. Mention of the river in the poem is neither accidental nor to be read parenthetically. As Hill argues, the Jordan has close ties to the nativity, providing connections with baptism and birth, and the typological connections between the Jordan and the Harrowing are similarly vital to the poem's narrative.[138] The final exhortation emphasizes the necessity of baptism through praise for this sacrament instituted by Christ Himself, and by pointing out that this inspiring act was done for the whole world, the audience is invited on a 'harrowing' themselves. Since 'early Christian exegesis sees the movement "trans Iordanum" into the promised land as a type of the Harrowing of Hell',[139] this spiritual rebirth can be re-enacted through the act of baptism. What this exegetical explanation means then for Anglo-Saxons converts is that the Harrowing was a prime allusion to spiritual rebirth and that this new life in Christ brought through baptism was available for the past, present and future.

The main theme of the poem points to baptism by way of the speakers, the overall narrative, and the baptismal echoes made through the antiphons which incorporate allusions closely tied to the sacrament. Considering that the antiphonal episodes begin with an emphasis on Christ's birth in Bethlehem, followed by a tribute to Mary and her role in bringing Christ into the world, one might expect the concluding antiphons to end with Christ's death and Resurrection; however, the final antiphon puzzlingly focuses on the Jordan River. Therefore, is there any coherence to the first two and final two antiphons and how, if there is any reason, do they function together? As the first two antiphons concentrate on Christ's birth while emphasizing Gabriel's message and Mary's significance in bringing the Saviour into the world, the third and fourth antiphons deal with death, as explicated by mention of Jerusalem, the place of Christ's Crucifixion, and rebirth as exemplified through the baptism in the Jordan.[140] The parallels are evident by comparing the first and third antiphons and the second and fourth antiphonal passages.

Because the theological discourse associating baptism with Ecclesia's womb has a long tradition stemming from the post-Constantinian period, the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* draws the parallel between Mary's womb and Christ's initial birth with the Church's womb represented by the fourth antiphon's emphasis on the Jordan.[141] Baptism in itself, is a process of symbolically entering

138 Paraphrased from Hill (1972), pp. 387–8.

139 Tamburr (2007), p. 54.

140 For further analyses of the apostrophes and their tropological significance see Ch. 4, pp. 114–17.

141 For further discussion concerning baptism as representing the womb of the Church in early Christianity, see R. Jensen (2008), 'Mater Ecclesia and Fons Aeterna: The Church and her Womb in Ancient Christianity', in *The Feminist Companion to Patristic Literature*, ed. A.-J. Levine. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, pp. 137–55.

the grave and being reborn; thus, the antiphons are presented in a cyclic manner reinforcing the theme in the very way in which they are displayed. What is evident in the positioning of the antiphons is the cyclic theme of birth, death and rebirth, and with this crossing over from historical into liturgical time, the poet conjures up a greater sense of the message of salvation and eternal life. Whereas the idea of literal rebirth is not achievable within the Christian tradition, the sacramental ritual of baptism provides a symbolic outlet to exercise the beginning of a new life through this cleansing and Redemptive act. Similarly, the association between baptism and the womb is supported by the typological link between the purification of baptism and that water that flows at birth; needless to say, the pairing of these images was non-coincidental and familiar to the poet.[142]

The fact that the *descensus* motif is not central in this supposedly 'Descent' poem has often baffled scholars. However, recognizing that the overriding theme is baptismal in nature justifies the brief description of Christ's Descent, because the concise Harrowing episode is immediately followed by John's monologue. Analysis of the poem's structure of the poem clarifies why the *descensus* motif is utilized the way it is and provides a greater sense of the poem's didactic function. The theme of rebirth through the purifying act of baptism is stressed heavily in *John the Baptist's Prayer* through the various references to water and fire, and further emphasized, most notably through the act of Christ's Descent into the Underworld. As with Christ's initial baptism in which His ministry on earth comes to a close and His mission nears completion His Descent into the fire allows for His rebirth as humanity's Saviour in His divine form.[143] This act of cleansing and the image of rebirth associated with fire has roots dating back many millennia which was also carried over into the Christian tradition.[144] Parallels to baptism by fire and its association with the Holy Ghost are echoed in John the Baptist's words in the Gospel of Matthew. John here exclaims: 'ego quidem vos baptizo in aqua in paeniteniam qui autem post me venturus est fortiori me est cuius non sum dignus calciamenta

142 Representations of this typological link between birth and baptism were known in various parts of Europe, and by the tenth century were evident in much iconography. For further analysis of this link see P. A. Patton (1994), 'Et Partu Fontis Exceptum: The Typology of Birth and Baptism in an Unusual Spanish Image of Jesus Baptized in a Font', *Gesta* 33. 2, 79–92.

143 See n. 68 of this chapter and Ch. 3, pp. 87–8 concerning the poet's representation of Christ's divinity.

144 Various ancient versions of the phoenix, a mythical bird, boast of the creature's longevity and never-ending life cycle as it consumes itself by fire only to be reborn and begin life anew. The myth was borrowed and adapted in ancient Egyptian, Phoenician, Greek, Persian and Chinese cultures, but the overriding theme in the various myths was the concept of rebirth or resurrection from fire. For an in-depth study of the myth's history and meaning see R. van den Broek (1972), *The Myth of the Phoenix according to Classical and Early Christian Traditions*. Leiden: E. J. Brill. For scriptural references see Job 29: 12 (although modern translations of this verse in Job use the word 'sands' the Hebrew word *khol* has two meanings, one being sand and the other phoenix), Dan. 3; Eze. 22: 18–21 and Matt. 3: 11. It must be noted that these references are not ones in which fire relates to punishment. Rather, these verses are representative of fire used in a manner of spiritual cleansing and suggestive of renewal. See also Appendix 2 at line 1 ff. and lines 107–37 for further scriptural references in connection with baptism, the Descent and Resurrection.

portare ipse vos baptizabit in Spiritu Sancto et igni'.[145] As the words of John in Matthew's Gospel anticipate Christ's coming while similarly allude to His role in forgiveness and redemption, likewise, John's message in the poem is first anticipatory of Christ's arrival in Hell as well as His Second Coming, with additional emphasis on the saving grace of baptism (lines 30–2 and 129–30).

What is signified in the simple act of the *descensus* itself is that Christ not only shows Himself triumphant over evil, He demonstrates the end of an old way of life and the beginning of a new moral code for humanity. A succinct description of Christ's Descent is given in the lines: *fȳsde hine þā tō fore frēa moncynnes*, He *mid þȳ cyneþrymme [cwōm] tō helle* (lines 33 and 51, respectively). This brief, yet powerful image of Christ's Descent has often left readers perplexed as to why a supposed narrative of the *descensus* and Harrowing could be so fragmentary and unclear. Why mention the Descent and not focus on the subsequent rescue and ascent? The answer is presented in the momentary act of the Descent itself in which there lies not only the defeat of death, signifying the end of the Enemy's reign over not only the saints, but also a rather blatant suggestion that Christ will rescue all, past, present and future who are willing to make that personal 'descent' demonstrated through the act of baptism. Through Christ's immersion into the fiery pit of the Underworld, He would emerge from the flames as the Saviour of mankind, collapsing the domain that unjustly held the unbaptized saints. As *ongeat þā gēomormōd godes sylfes sīð* (line 52), John recognizes Christ's objective and by reflecting on the symbolism of Christ's immersion into the flames of Hell and acknowledging that His mission is to liberate the unbaptized saints, the overriding message of the passage ingeniously highlights that the audience has a similar mission to partake in baptism, thus descending with Christ and allowing His saving grace to free them from impending, perpetual doom. The poem's message urging readers towards baptism is reminiscent of the Apostle Paul's message to the Romans. St Paul states:

> Quid ergo dicemus permanebimus in peccato ut gratia abundet absit qui enim mortui sumus peccato quomodo adhuc vivemus in illo an ignoratis quia quicumque baptizati sumus in Christo Iesu in morte ipsius baptizati sumus consepulti enim sumus cum illo per baptismum in mortem ut quomodo surrexit Christus a mortuis per gloriam Patris ita et nos in novitate vitae ambulemus si enim conplantati facti sumus similitudini mortis eius simul et resurrectionis erimus hoc scientes quia vetus homo noster simul crucifixus est ut destruatur corpus peccati ut ultra non serviamus peccato qui enim mortuus est iustificatus est a peccato si autem mortui sumus cum Christo credimus quia simul etiam vivemus cum Christo scientes quod Christus surgens ex mortuis iam non moritur mors illi ultra non dominabitur quod enim mortuus est peccato mortuus est semel quod autem vivit vivit Deo ita et vos existimate vos mortuos quidem esse peccato viventes autem Deo in Christo Iesu.[146]

[145] Matt. 3: 11, which reads: 'I indeed baptize you in the water unto penance, but he that shall come after me, is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire.'

[146] Rom. 6: 1–11. 'What shall we say, then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. For we that are dead to sin, how shall we live any longer therein? Know you not that all we, who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in his death? For we are buried

Like St Paul's explanation that Christians partake in this symbolic ceremony involving death and rebirth, the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* encourages readers to descend with Christ as a necessary component of salvation. In the act of taking the journey with the women, readers are seductively led down to Hell as well, and like the women who would find something new when they arrived at their destination, by the end of the poem the journey ends somewhat unpredictably with the baptismal liturgy inviting the audience to partake in baptism themselves (lines 14–15 and 133–7). Thus, the basis of the story relies on an old theological tradition, but the packaging is new, perhaps because of its dramatic potential for late Anglo-Saxon audiences. As Bedingfield explains,

> Appreciation of early Christian stories in ritualistic terms contextualizes them as something more than just history, something that may have a direct impact on contemporary Christians, and which can be made personally accessible through ritual expression, when those raised on this symbolic, liturgical language have been educated about the significance of the individual elements. Narratives with this sort of flavour reflect on paper what is expressed actively in the liturgy, the ability of liturgical symbolism to personalize commemoration, to juxtapose the participants of dramatic liturgical ritual with Christian history. It is ritual's ability to make the participants an active part of the events re-actualized that makes it 'dramatic'.[147]

Liturgy, baptism and Eastertide are closely interlinked in Christianity, so it is no surprise that echoes of the baptismal sacrament and the Easter liturgy embody the main theme within this religious poem. To emphasize the importance of baptism within the Christian community makes the connection with Christ more real. The power of the story and its liturgical echoes brings the Anglo-Saxon audience into the presence of the event of baptism, drawing an entire community in to participate in such a vital ritual within the Christian faith.

DRAMA AND ITS FUNCTION WITHIN THE POEM

As Bedingfield argues, it is not common to hear the 'words "Anglo-Saxon" and "drama" spoken together'[148] unless to say that there is hardly evidence to suggest that drama existed within the Anglo-Saxon period. Some sixty-five years ago, G. K. Anderson highlighted the lack of any extant evidence of secular

> together with him by baptism into death; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer. For he that is dead is justified from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall live also together with Christ: Knowing that Christ rising again from the dead, dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over him. For in that he died to sin, he died once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God: So do you also reckon, that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

147 Bedingfield (2002), p. 7.

148 Ibid., p. 3.

drama, and the critic made an attempt to feature poetic passages that either implied drama or somehow illustrated a dramatic atmosphere.[149] Anderson's brief commentary on the subject suggests that there was little evidence of drama within Old English literature to warrant the topic a great deal of time and analysis.[150] Regardless of the amount of analysis carried out by Anderson, the point is that for earlier critics, drama seemed nearly non-existent in Anglo-Saxon verse. Anderson's definition of drama can be summarized quite simply as 'demanding the interplay of two or more characters',[151] but he was quite clear in his assertion that 'to judge from the literature which an Anglo-Saxon has left behind him . . . it is difficult to see him as the possessor of any strong dramatic sense or the mimetic artist of vivacity and imagination'.[152]

Critics of poetry from the Anglo-Saxon period, like Anderson, tend to judge and define any dramatic characteristics contained in Old English texts based on established theatrical features of later medieval drama, yet in a more recent study A. Frantzen highlights the fact that the Anglo-Saxons had a sophisticated technique of dramatic performance derived from the Roman theatre.[153] It should also be noted that the vast majority of Old English poetry is the product of an oral culture, giving the impression of spontaneous productions of performances or as Frantzen contends a 'staged discourse'.[154] Drama does not possess physical architectural limitations, as a theatre would have, and although there is no evidence of stages and theatres among the Anglo-Saxons, the narrative structure of Old English poetry, as Frantzen suggests, is a contributing factor in defining drama. That being said, performance and literature often coincided within the Anglo-Saxon period and there is much evidence of this throughout the entire corpus of its literature.

As T. Campbell argues, 'perhaps rather than trying to look at medieval drama chronologically, one can best appreciate its development by abandoning the traditional chronological scheme in favor of a more unified approach'.[155] A 'more unified approach' suggests analysing medieval drama or dramatic texts from any period on the basis of an established set of components that qualify as 'drama', as opposed to defining drama on the basis of its historical roots. By addressing the crux of Campbell's argument, perhaps critics of drama should employ a 'more unified' method which would allow for a better understanding of drama within any period. When searching for evidence of performance or dramatic literature within the Anglo-Saxon period it seems quite natural to refer to the cycle or mystery plays of the later Middle Ages or even to drama

149 Anderson (1949, repr. 1997).
150 Ibid., pp. 206–11.
151 Ibid., p. 207.
152 Ibid., p. 209.
153 A. Frantzen (2007), *Performance in Old English Poetry: Theatre and the Literature of the Anglo-Saxons*. J. N. Toller Lecture, Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, Manchester University, 5 March. See also A. Frantzen (2007, repr: 2010), 'Drama and Dialogue in Old English Poetry: The Scene of Cynewulf's *Juliana*', *Theatre Survey 48.1*, 99–118.
154 Frantzen (2010), p. 104.
155 T. Campbell (1981), 'Liturgy and Drama: Recent Approaches to Medieval Theatre', *Theatre Journal* 33.3, 290–1.

within the Roman theatre. However, looking at any dramatic material from the Anglo-Saxon period in comparison with later drama like the mystery and miracle plays hinders understanding of Anglo-Saxon culture, Old English texts and comprehension of the development of drama in general. Without examining drama or 'dramatic sensibility'[156] within the period on its own merits, medieval drama and its developments have been inadequately discussed.

According to Frantzen the necessary components for drama include

> A speaker, and an audience; dialogue that requires impersonation; gestures and words that knit the speaker's world to that of the onlookers; the creation of social communication and exchanges of meaning; and a text that establishes a standard of repetition but allows for each realization to manifest unique qualities.[157]

With these 'components' there is a foundation to evaluate drama that contains a more 'unifying' approach which can be applied to texts from all periods, not to mention within the Anglo-Saxon period.[158] Scrutinizing *John the Baptist's Prayer* in light of Frantzen's suggestion that drama was evident and utilized for a purpose in Anglo-Saxon England uncovers remarkable results. By highlighting the *dramatic sensibility* within the poem and by further emphasizing elements within it may warrant the text as a forerunner for full-scale theatrical productions involving the same theme in the later Middle Ages.

Although histories of western theatre seem to agree that drama was reborn within the liturgical framework of the medieval Church some time during the tenth century, few agree on exactly what happened to the drama during the course of the next five centuries. In part, at least, this confusion stems from scholarly debate over the past quarter century about the development of medieval theatre. O. B. Hardison questioned the assumptions of earlier scholars such as E. K. Chambers and K. Young that suggested that medieval drama grew in incremental stages from the simplest forms to the most elaborate dramatic productions.[159] More recent scholarly study surveying Old English literature raises no objections, as Hardison's work does, to previous views on the history of drama; in fact most studies do not discuss drama in Old English literature at all.[160] Behind all of these ideas, however, remains a fundamental question: why are Old English texts not being re-evaluated for their dramatic sensibility, especially those of a liturgical nature? Perhaps it is because many are not familiar with liturgy in general and the symbolism behind many of the words, images and gestures communicated out of liturgy

156 On 'dramatic sensibility', I refer to Bedingfield's (2002), pp. 4–10, work which suggests that a poetic or liturgical text can demonstrate a dramatic atmosphere and contain a degree of dramatic elements which draws a reader in, but such a text may not be regarded as a traditional 'dramatic' text created for a performance.

157 Frantzen (2010), p. 99.

158 See the third subsection of Ch. 4 for comparisons to the *Christ* poem.

159 For surveys of the evolution of medieval drama see Chambers (1967) and Young (1933). For a thorough survey of the evolution of drama throughout western history and subsequent critical assessment from its origins to the mid twentieth-century see Hardison (1965), pp. 1–34.

160 See the first chapter in Hardison (1965). Frantzen (2007), p. 116, argues that drama is not identified in a number of studies dealing with Anglo-Saxon literature. See C. L. Wrenn (1967), *A Study of Old English Literature*. London: Harrap.

and liturgical texts, but whatever the case, Old English liturgical texts warrant closer attention in relation to drama. An important interconnection between liturgy and an audience or, in the case of *John the Baptist's Prayer*, poets and the readers of liturgical prose and poetry is quite strong.

The nature of the Easter liturgy is sacramental in character and as Frantzen states, 'the mimesis of Christian experience'.[161] A common component of the Easter liturgy was the depiction or narration of the Harrowing of Hell, and as a motif, the *descensus* contains dramatic force not just because it contains a great deal of action or perhaps because of the powerful images that come to mind when one hears the story of Christ freeing the righteous from Hell but because those reading the story, or hearing the sermon, or partaking in the liturgy are, as Bedingfield states, 'themselves being freed from the darkness of Hell'.[162] The story on its most basic level is rather seductive and easily draws readers in allowing them to become part of the narrative themselves.

For such a small poem *John the Baptist's Prayer* is marked by theatricality, and although at first glance the poem may appear purely narrative, it is in fact profoundly dramatic. Narration is reserved for the brief introduction at the beginning of the poem in order to set the scene or backdrop in which the story will unfold, while the dominant mode of discourse throughout the poem is direct speech, such as John the Baptist's speech to Christ which takes up nearly three quarters of the poem or the anonymous speaker's direct interjectory to listeners at the end of the poem. With a compelling speech to the audience urging them into action the poet provides an opportunity for reader reaction to and interaction with the text.

Bedingfield argues that 'the interpretation of monologues or dialogue from poetry or prose as 'drama' depends upon a performance in which a role is undertaken'.[163] Dialogue in *John the Baptist's Prayer* is evident, but it is not so much the interaction of characters; the poem more closely illustrates dialogue and interaction between the narrator and audience. This interaction with the audience was not uncommon in liturgy and what this stepping out of the text to speak directly to the audience does is allow them to be an integral component in the final outcome of the story. The direct speech along with the poem's unity of time, place and action provide good conditions for drama to take place.

So as not to understate the dramatic events the poet chooses to condense some descriptions which in turn move the action along quickly and economically without detracting from the main theme of the poem that offers a contemporary and timeless salvation message for the audience. To linger on the Descent would be a diversion from the main theme. The power of *John the Baptist's Prayer* is not one of physical description but of emotive spiritual and physical response and the poet drawing in his audience has less to do with the poem's action and more to do with compunction; thus the audience, as with many liturgies, has a participatory role outside of the poem.

161 Frantzen (2007).
162 Bedingfield (2002), p. 145.
163 Ibid., p. 3.

Since the crux of the poem is not focused on the actual Harrowing as an event and is more concerned with liturgy and the idea of an audience being urged towards baptism through the echoes of liturgical rituals that ring so clearly in the text, this then still necessitates action or performance to occur. However, there is an inverted arrangement of where the action takes place. By inverted arrangement, I mean action takes place outside of the text and not within it, as readers are required to participate. The role of the reader or audience member is of great importance in terms of how the narrative unfolds, because audience participation in baptism develops the meaning of the text. With Christ's Descent providing the backdrop of the story, the Exeter Book poem constantly reminds the audience to participate in baptism, through its countless references to the sacrament which ultimately signals a response. As Frantzen explains, 'gestures, communicated through the texts, illustrated emotions, moods etc., thus the language of the hands was incorporated into narrative poetry'.[164] In the same way, the narrator or poet in the final lines of *John the Baptist's Prayer* is not pointing the finger with a scolding gesture reminding listeners that they best be ready for the Second Coming; rather, his words suggest a welcoming open-hand gesture, inviting listeners to come to the waters of baptism and receive the gift of salvation.

The originality of the poetic rendering, despite its drawing on such a long and varied tradition, is seen in the poem's focus on John the Baptist, who dominates over the Patriarchs, the Prophets, Adam and the others who are so prominent in the other versions of the Harrowing. Why the emphasis on John? The poem is based on the imagery of baptism, thus John (as the selected vehicle of welcome) seems most appropriate to a theme overtly dealing with the sacrament.[165] It is notable that the speeches of the other inhabitants in the analogous works do not really inform the words of John in *John the Baptist's Prayer*.[166] The story may have a long-standing narrative tradition, although the narrative's structure and perspective of the main character within *John the Baptist's Prayer* are unique. The dependency on John the Baptist to progress the action of the story goes against traditional representations of the Harrowing for a purpose and as Trask states, 'John and all men have partaken of original sin as much as Adam; [thus] the context is not only ambiguous, it is universal'.[167] Through John's character, the poet offers a glimpse of the theatrical as nearly everything in the poem depends on his performance. As Bedingfield claims, 'the liturgy inherited by the tenth-century Anglo-Saxons was inherently set up to encourage identification with biblical figures',[168] therefore through the actions and words of John within the text, the audience, itself, was subsequently taking on the role of John. This sort of narrative device, putting the explanation of the *descensus* into the mouth of one who is to be freed, by proxy prepares the

164 Frantzen (2007).
165 For discussion of John's vital role in the poem and the emphasis on baptism see Ch. 3, pp. 62–3, 91–6 and Ch. 4, pp. 106–8 of this edition.
166 See Ch. 4, pp. 107–17.
167 Trask (1971), p. 424.
168 Bedingfield (2002), p. 10.

audience to see themselves as being freed from sin by the light of Christ on Easter Eve. The intensity of the drama lies in the actor/audience dynamic, and this invitation to participate actively in the poem's narrative links the audience with the drama, giving evidence of dramatically inspired poetry in Old English and offering a glimpse of the theatricality of an Anglo-Saxon's own life.

Furthermore, the poem can be read as a liturgical text with a brief introductory setting that is appropriate to the theme.[169] The poem evolves into an expression of worship, and moves from an exhortation involving allusions to Christ to the inclusive incantation which realizes His purpose to redeem the lost. These antiphonal invocations draw the audience in allowing listeners to reply to John's lines with liturgical responses which should ultimately lead towards salvation and an affirmation of faith. The liturgical responses function to confirm faith and are signals for the audience to perform the sacrament of baptism. There is an obvious means to an end, which involves salvation and baptism for the Anglo-Saxon audience, and although the poet's use of language and structure is subtle rather than blatantly obvious from the onset, the outcome for the audience is to be rewarding in terms of acting on the discovered message within the poem. The final speaker within the poem is directing listeners, urging them to participate and subsequently allowing them to become part of the theatricality of the poem. Additionally, the use of antiphons is used in a liturgical or worship-like manner in other Anglo-Saxon pieces as well. *Christ I* and *Blickling Homily VII* are examples that share antiphonal-like invocations, calling for audience responses through participation.[170]

Analysis of *John the Baptist's Prayer* and its dramatic qualities seems to suggest that an area of study in medieval performance studies has certainly been overlooked. A poem like *John the Baptist's Prayer* and other poems, such as the Exeter Book's *Christ* poem, *Guthlac*, *Juliana* and the *Vercelli Homilies*, signify much more than religious texts that are suggestive of liturgical influence within the Anglo-Saxon period.[171] These texts require a response or call on readers and listeners to participate in such a way that performance on the part of the audience is a necessary component of the texts' message. What today's readers may be overlooking is recognizing how the participatory function of poetry was actually a *type* of drama. Perhaps this participatory function is less obvious or altogether missing in most secular Old English texts; however, as already stated, Old English poetry is rooted in orality which essentially implies performance.[172] More or less, there was an exchange of meaning with

169 For further discussion of this idea see Brantley (1999), p. 53, n. 34.

170 See *Christ I*, lines 18–21, 50–4, 71–7, 104–8, 130–3, 164–7; and *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* (Morris 1967, *Blickling Homily XIII*, pp. 136–59). In this edition, see Ch. 4 subsections 2 and 3 for further discussion on antiphonal comparisons between the *Blickling Homily*, the *Christ* poem and *John the Baptist's Prayer*.

171 As suggested by Frantzen (2007), other poetic texts that give evidence of performance in Anglo-Saxon England see *Juliana*, lines 352–6, 443–60; *Guthlac A*, lines 108 ff.; *Beowulf*, lines 1063–8, 2041–50, and the *Vercelli Homilies*.

172 Because there are strong links between liturgy and performance and because there is evidence of liturgical structuring in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, I argue that these links imply a performative quality. I am not suggesting that the poem was an oral poem, but more generally that there is evidence of the oral tradition and spontaneous compositions in some of the earlier Old

signifiers or indicators that would have compelled audiences of this poetry into action, signals within these poems which were recognizable in the past, but that today's audiences would not detect easily. Arguably, how the Anglo-Saxons responded to these texts needs further analysis, for it will give us a better understanding of the development of drama within the Anglo-Saxon period and more generally drama in literature.

I am not suggesting that the poem or for that matter any poetry within the Anglo-Saxon period is full-scale drama that was produced for the sole purpose of re-enactment. However, analysis of poems such as *John the Baptist's Prayer* within the context of *dramatic sensibility* offers evidence to suggest that the audience and its subsequent response were integral components of how the Old English poem worked. There were prompting expressions within liturgical poems that invited listeners to participate, whether such participation involved responding to the liturgical indicators or actively partaking in baptism. Although there is no tangible evidence that *John the Baptist's Prayer* was performed within the Anglo-Saxon period, there are elements within it that have *dramatic sensibility* and perhaps by evaluating and re-evaluating the language, themes and messages within Old English texts, like *John the Baptist's Prayer*, critics might be better able to understand the development of performance and dramatic literature throughout the entire medieval period. There is much evidence that should credit it as a forerunner for later medieval drama which eventually flourished into full-scale productions, since the necessary components, according to Frantzen, are all present within the poem.[173]

There is not necessarily a need to redefine the term *drama*, therefore, in order to discover texts that are dramatic or served a performative function in the Anglo-Saxon period. Although *John the Baptist's Prayer* was not a staged performance, it is realistic to suggest that this liturgical text among other old English poetic works was dramatically inspired and had theatrical elements in which audience participation was encouraged and necessary. There is definitely a connection between liturgy and drama and the 'innovation and liturgical

English poetry, like *Beowulf* or *Cædmon's Hymn*. The origins of composition of Old English poetry is beyond the scope of this edition, although I acknowledge scholarly debate regarding the oral tradition vs. literary composition. I am aware of the 'myth of the Anglo-Saxon oral poet', which suggests that composition of early Old English poetry was created in mead halls and continued to be composed in this way for centuries. This idealization of the oral tradition in Anglo-Saxon England has been scrutinized by scholars who argue that most Old English poetry was composed in a literary environment. The debate is discussed by A. H. Olsen (1988), 'Oral-Formulaic Research in Old English Studies: II', *Oral Tradition* 3, 138–90, and R. Finnegan (1988), *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication*. Oxford: Blackwell. For a select discussion of the arguments suggesting a literary composition of poetry see K. O'Brien O'Keeffe (1990), *Visible Song, Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–46; J. D. Niles (2003), 'The Myth of the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet', *Western Folklore* 63.1/2, 7–61; R. Frank (1993), 'The Search for the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 75, 11–36; and N. Howe (1989), *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*. New Haven: Yale University Press. For select readings of the oral tradition see F. P. Magoun, Jr (1953), 'The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry', *Speculum* 28, 446–67; M. Innes. (1998), 'Memory, Orality and Literacy in an Early Medieval Society', *Past and Present* 158, 3–36; and R. P. Creed (1959), 'The Making of an Anglo-Saxon Poem', *English Literary History* 26.4, 445–54.

173 See n. 157 of this chapter.

function can be part of the same dynamic, rather than struggling against each other as drama arises out of liturgy'.[174] Perhaps modern readers often fail to recognize or remember the close contact these dramatic performances had with actual Church services; however, liturgy is so closely tied to performance that the connections should not be overlooked. The truth is that understanding of drama within the Anglo-Saxon period is limited, and despite the somewhat natural inclination to compare it to drama from either the Roman theatre which preceded it or the later medieval period, it is an injustice to the field of Anglo-Saxon studies not to examine its dramatic literature on its own merits, as texts like *John the Baptist's Prayer* offer so much in terms of understanding text and audience reaction and interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the material in Chapter 2 demonstrated an awareness of the doctrine of the Descent, it comes as no surprise that the narrative was exploited in a variety of literary forms. The theological consideration of salvation for the Old Testament figures in Hell became the launching pad for literary evaluation of the subject in both apostolic and post-canonical writings. The topic of salvation was of primary importance in the Church, and the *descensus* narrative allowed for both a didactic and dramatic manner in which to convey the soul's need for salvation. For the Anglo-Saxons, any anxiety about salvation could be quelled through considerations of the subject through either textual and/or artistic renderings; and a text like *John the Baptist's Prayer* with its liturgical approximation provides a timely piece for Eastertide functioning liturgically to address redemption for the soul. What the poet achieves by taking the seed of the *descensus* narrative and transforming the text into a baptismal testimony through allusions, imagery, choice of characters and diction, is that he provides an inspiring piece exploiting the links between liturgy and drama to speak directly to the audience. The poet's interpretation of the *descensus* reveals him to be an advocate for the soul's need of salvation, and with this in mind, he creates an atmosphere for immediate conversion. Through his conscious treatment of time, the poet seizes the opportunity to convey the message of salvation during the most appropriate of seasons and by fusing Germanic and Christian elements together, he speaks to his Anglo-Saxon audience in a manner that undoubtedly would have appealed to their sensibilities. As he articulates the message of the Passion through his language, imagery and allusions, the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* constantly harkens back to baptism, suggesting to the Anglo-Saxons that their opportunity to act is present.

[174] Bedingfield (2005), p. 302.

4

Selected Comparative Studies and Analogous Literature

There seems nothing peculiar about an Anglo-Saxon poet writing about the theme of the *descensus*, since the motif was so popular during the period. Certainly narratives of the *descensus* could conjure up images of liberation, salvation and judgement, and in many instances within the corpus of Old English poetry, writers exercised literary passion to convey what was evidently a popular narrative. Most often, as this chapter examines, the *descensus* motif was employed to communicate the details of Christ's Passion, the salvation that comes through Him and His victory over Satan. This cosmic struggle between good and evil which had its roots in the Bible and Christian legend met its climax during retellings of the *descensus*; however, as one would expect a poem entitled *Descent into Hell* to conform to the typical Anglo-Saxon narratives of the Descent like so many other Old English texts, the poem's blatant deviation from tradition suggests that an objective other than the recitation of the *descensus* narrative is at its core.

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S PRAYER AND *THE GOSPEL OF NICODEMUS*

Before turning attention to Anglo-Saxon poetic comparisons, it would be useful to examine *John the Baptist's Prayer* in relation to the Anglo-Saxon version of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*.[1] When comparing the two works, the dissimilarities are immediate. Whereas the *Gospel of Nicodemus* provides a full and detailed account of the evidence surrounding Christ's Descent, the 137 lines of *John the Baptist's Prayer* necessitate a limited selection of narrative details. While there is freedom in the prose version of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* to convey the account in great detail without having to conform to rules regarding form and structure, the literary control and conventions necessary for a poetic handling of similar subject matter, or any other complex narrative for that matter, would be extremely difficult, at the very least. Whereas a prose version would contain fewer restrictions in terms of word choice, by contrast, a poetic rendering would require a poet to be more selective with details and diction in order to employ the traditional and highly stylized features present in Anglo-Saxon verse.[2] This is not to say that such a poetic rendering was beyond the scope

1 See Ch. 2, pp. 47–50, for a detailed description of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

2 By highly stylized features of Anglo-Saxon verse, I mean the employment of oral formula,

of a poet's ability since many Anglo-Saxon poets demonstrated proficiency and finesse in their individual verse treatments of long narratives. Likewise, there is no need to suggest any limitations on the capabilities of the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* since he demonstrates great skill and aptitude in his rendition.[3] What I am suggesting here is that given that the poem is short, it is obvious that its content is not going to mirror exactly the subject matter of the narrative account in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Having established that the literary forms in which the *descensus* was treated would lend itself to obvious differences in the way the narrative was conveyed, this difference in narrative expression does not account for the many differences in content and theme.

Whereas the *Gospel of Nicodemus* begins with an episode involving the two men, Leucius and Karinus, who bore witness to Christ's Harrowing of Hell, *John the Baptist's Prayer*, on the other hand, makes no mention of these two men. Instead, the focus is placed on the preparation and journey of the sorrowful Marys. While the men in the apocryphal text testify to the validity of the *descensus* through their eye-witness account, their absence in *John the Baptist's Prayer* is fitting because the poem does not set out to recount the exact events of the Harrowing as it transpired. Rather, the women in the poem set the tone for a journey and by proxy they represent the poem's audience. Both are progressing towards the 'unknowing'. The ambiguity of the opening sequence of the text concludes with discovery, and affirmation or reaffirmation of faith.

The *Gospel of Nicodemus* as a source for *John the Baptist's Prayer* has been long established,[4] and although the poem's poet may have been quite familiar with the Latin version of the apocryphal text, if not an Old English translation or paraphrase, it is clear that the poem is widely divergent from the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. The poet's constant references and echoes to baptism indicate that his concern is with matters of salvation, rather than conveying either a dichotomous narrative between good and evil lords or a verse account of Christ's Descent.

Despite the difference in focus, one cannot deny the correspondences between the apocryphal text and *John the Baptist's Prayer*. Of the many characters represented in the prose account the main characters included in the *Gospel*

alliteration, Old English metre, and kennings, etc. Given the brevity of a poem like *John the Baptist's Prayer*, it is natural that not all of these characteristics dominate the poem's structure. However, there is some evidence of oral formula whilst the other features evident in the poem which are common in most Old English poetry are discussed in Ch. 1 of this edition. See pp. 22–30. For further discussion of the features of Anglo-Saxon verse see R. D. Fulk and C. M. Cain (2003), *A History of Old English Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell. For further reading on the subject of Anglo-Saxon verse see A. Crépin (2005), *Old English Poetics: A Technical Handbook*. AMAES, hors série 12, Paris; Magoun (1953); and D. K. Fry (1987), 'The Cliff of Death in Old English Poetry', in *Comparative Research in Oral Traditions: A Memorial for Milman Parry*, ed. J. M. Foley. Columbus: Slavica, pp. 213–34.

3 Narratives of this kind are exemplified in works such as *Beowulf*, the *Christ* poems, *Guthlac A* and *B* and *Elene*, to name a few.

4 Although Wülcker (1872) first suggested the *Gospel of Nicodemus* was the source of *John the Baptist's Prayer*, it was Kirkland (1885), p. 11, who proposed that, specifically, the second part of the poem was based on the *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

of Nicodemus narrative are Adam, several Old Testament Prophets, Christ and Satan, personified representations of Hell and Death, Leucius and Karinus, the two men who are eye-witnesses to Christ's Harrowing and are raised from death to retell the event to the Sanhedrin and John the Baptist, who also features in the prose account. As previously discussed, Christ is more of a presence in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, whilst Satan is a wandering exile.[5] Although most other characters are altogether missing in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, the representation of John the Baptist in both accounts reveals interesting parallels. His presence and role in Hell involves heralding Christ's coming, although his character in the apocryphon is a conflated version of the one found in *John the Baptist's Prayer*. Whereas John the Baptist is already in Hell in the poetic account, the prose narrative and its Old English counterpart describe John as appearing suddenly as though from thin air, and given his unrecognizable appearance he is asked to identify himself. The *Gospel of Nicodemus* describes that at midnight a bright light appears, radiating warmth similar to that of the golden sun's midday heat and glimmering with a tint of regal, purple radiance. Once the illumination reaches Hell's domain John appears, and after being questioned by the Patriarchs and Prophets he explains that he has arrived to prepare the way for Christ's Harrowing. Although it is most likely that he was in the crowd of saints and came forward to speak, this revelation to the Patriarchs suggests a spiritual awakening and readying for Christ's coming, whereas John's presence and length of stay in the Underworld in *John the Baptist's Prayer* is clearly specified as he has been preparing the Hell-dwellers in Hell for the last six months. The three accounts state:

John the Baptist's Prayer (lines 24b–29a):

> Sægde Iohannis,
> hæleð helwarum, hlyhhende spræc
> mōdig tō þǣre mengo ymb his mæges [sīð]:
> 'Hæfde mē gehāten hælend ūser,
> þā hē mē on þisne sīð sendan wolde,
> þæt hē mē gesōht[e ymb s]iex mōnað,
> ealles folces fruma.

Gospel of Nicodemus, Latin Text:

> Et post hec superuenit quasi heremicola et interrogates ab omnibus, 'Quis es tu?' Quibus respondens dixit: 'Ego sum Iohannes, uox et prophaeta altissimi, preibi ante faciem aduentus eius preparare uias eius ad dandam scientiam salutis plebe eius in remissione peccatorum.[6]

Gospel of Nicodemus Old English Text:

> And æfter þam þær com swylce þunres slege and ealle þa halgan ongean clypodon and cwædon: 'Hwæt eart þu?' Seo stefen heorm andswarode and cwæð: 'Ic eom

[5] See Ch. 3, pp. 75–6.

[6] Cross (1996), p. 204: 'And after these things, there came up as it were, a hermit and he was interrogated by everyone, "Who are you?" He said in response: "I am John, the voice and Prophet of the Most High, I have come before the face of His coming to prepare His ways in order to give knowledge of salvation to His people for the remission of their sins."'

> Iohannes þæs hehsta witega and ic eom cumen toforan hym þæt ic his wegas gegearwian sceal and geican þa hæle hys folces'.[7]

An interesting feature is John's whereabouts as described in the three texts. John's presence in Hell is firmly stated in the poetic account as opposed to his sudden appearance in the prose versions which necessitates his introduction. Whereas the apocrypha's John appears immediately before Christ and is a herald of His coming, the character of John in the Exeter Book poem remains more consistent with the biblical account of John the Baptist's life by emphasizing the six-month timeframe that separated his birth and death from Christ. *John the Baptist's Prayer* asserts that John's role as precursor and herald of Christ, which John carried out when alive, continued when he was in Hell, because he preached deliverance to saints in Hell awaiting Christ's Descent.

Both versions of the apocryphal text are symbolic of a spiritual awakening occurring once John arrives in Hell which exempts him from the rules that apply to the rest of those who died before Christ because John is not committed to await the Saviour's return in Hell.[8] By contrast, John's presence in the Underworld in *John the Baptist's Prayer* places him in the same position as all others including the audience awaiting Christ's return. As those in Hell remain in shadowy obscurity, John's message offers a glimmer of hope to hold onto until the light of Christ pierces the darkness. The narrative in *John the Baptist's Prayer* reveals itself to be more than a retelling or conflated version of a historical event; rather, the significance lies in the timeless message of hope offered through John's character and words. The identity of the speaker or speakers in *John the Baptist's Prayer* is controversial, and although the usual speaker in *descensus* narratives is Adam, John's imploring voice is dominant in *John the Baptist's Prayer* where his speech specifically refers to Christ's baptism, and further highlights specific points of His ministry.[9] Clearly there is an optimistic message that John offers in all three texts and certainly his representation as a messenger of Christ is in accord with the Gospel. However, the manner in which John appears and the necessary introduction required of him in the two akin apocryphal texts signifies something deeper in the apocryphon, whereas his character and voice dominates *John the Baptist's Prayer* in its entirety. John exercises the same function as herald in all three texts; however, for the apocryphon a longer

7 Ibid., p. 205: 'And after that there came, then a clap of thunder and all the saints cried out and said: "Who are you?" The voice answered them and said: "I am John the Prophet of the Highest and I have come before Him that I might prepare His ways and extend the salvation of His folk."'

8 The concept of being 'saved' or experiencing a spiritual awakening in Hell was a complicated matter of discussion for patristic commentators, and many commentators like Ireneaus, Clement, Origen and Ambrose explored the idea that Christ's Descent involved preaching and saving the lost. Interestingly, this idea became more dominant in the Eastern Church, while the Western tradition formed a more restrictive view suggesting that Christ's Descent only redeemed the Patriarchs and previous followers of a 'saviour'. See the final vertical column in Appendix 1.

9 See Ch. 3, pp. 80–1 and n. 96 for discussion on the number of speakers. For analysis of the specific points of Christ's ministry highlighted in the apocryphal text see M. R. James (1924, repr. 1966), 'The *Gospel of Nicodemus*, or *Acts of Pilate*', in *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 125.

narrative focusing on a cosmic struggle is to be played out, and in preparation for the imminent spiritual battle's climax, the character of John functions as herald for the coming Protagonist. Thus John's character and words in the poem are central to its main theme of baptism.

An analysis of the Patriarchs and Prophets in the poem and apocryphal text provides an interesting revelation of each text's respective message. In the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the Old English version, Adam, Eve, David, Habakkuk, Abraham, Isaiah, Micah (and others) are specifically named, as well as the implied redemption of a large host of unnamed Patriarchs and Prophets. By mentioning practically all of the Old Testament figures, the apocryphal writer demonstrates that Christ came for all of those Patriarchs, Prophets and instrumental Jewish figures from humanity's beginning up until His Descent. Save for Adam and Eve, most of the aforementioned figures remain silent in the apocryphal text and despite their presence their static nature seems to indicate not only that their scriptural roles had been fulfilled but also that only an escort to Heaven with Christ was all that remained for them. On the other hand, reference to the Patriarchs and Prophets in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, as one might expect, is more selective and the list includes the first man, Adam, and the Judaeo-Christian Patriarchs, along with Moses, David, and the Prophets Isaiah, and Zacharias. Still, many other unnamed biblical figures are still present (lines 44–9). While the listing within the poem may be seemingly arbitrary, nothing could be further from the truth. Through the naming of Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, the poet establishes Christian roots within the Judaic heritage, and furthermore the typological representations connect the Judaic Patriarchs with Easter imagery.[10] Adam, as the first man, brought sin and death into the world by eating the forbidden fruit, whilst Christ as the new Adam brings hope and life for past and future generations. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob represent a deep historical genealogy to the Christian faith and are usually mentioned together. Since Christ, as with all Jews, was said to descend from Abraham, Christ serves as the bridge from Judaism to Christianity, representing the link between the old law and new life. Further still, Isaac is generally associated with being one of the forefathers of the Hebrew people; however, his circumcision is in concordance with baptism and the outward marking of circumcision transforms into an inward marking on the soul when the act of baptism is performed (Gen. 21: 4). Baptism, as St Paul states, is the circumcision of the heart, and in his letter to the Romans, he explains:

> Si enim Abraham ex operibus iustificatus est habet gloriam sed non apud Deum quid enim scriptura dicit credidit Abraham Deo et reputatum est illi ad iustitiam ei autem qui operatur merces non inputatur secundum gratiam sed

[10] For further reading on typological references and the Bible see J. Daniélou (1960), *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. D. W. Hibberd. London, Burns & Oates. See also R. B. Burlin (1968), *The Old English Advent: A Typological Commentary*. New Haven: Yale University Press. For an extensive check-list of typological references in the Bible with commentary from Church Fathers see S. Bercovitch (1970), 'Selective Check-List on Typology', *Early American Literature* 5.1, 3–10. See also S. Bercovitch (1971), 'Selective Check-List on Typology: Part II', *Early American Literature* 6.2, 3, 12–16.

> secundum debitum ei vero qui non operatur credenti autem in eum qui iustificat impium reputatur fides eius ad iustitiam . . . et signum accepit circumcisionis signaculum iustitiae fidei quae est in praeputio ut sit pater omnium credentium per praeputium ut reputetur et illis ad iustitiam et sit pater circumcisionis non his tantum qui sunt ex circumcisione sed et his qui sectantur vestigia quae est in praeputio fidei patris nostri Abrahae non enim per legem promissio Abrahae aut semini eius ut heres esset mundi sed per iustitiam fidei.[11]

Additionally, through both circumcision and baptism's associations with cleansing and beginning a new life, these physical yet symbolic displays of devotion to God share a strong connection.[12] Although Isaac's presence in Hell awaiting redemption amongst the other Old Testament figures seems minimal as there is only mere mention of his name, his significance in relation to baptism makes it all the more important to be mentioned at all in the poem, as his representation further emphasizes the main theme of baptism within *John the Baptist's Prayer*. Artistic renderings of the connection between Isaac's circumcision and Christ's baptism were not uncommon and carried a typological significance concerning rebirth and conversion that may be altogether lost on modern readers. However, the poet's mention of Isaac is certainly not accidental or arbitrary.

Likewise, the significance in naming Moses and David goes beyond their association with liberation with the former leading the exiles into the promised land and the latter freeing the Israelites from an oppressive giant.[13] The crossing of the Red Sea was interpreted as a precursor of baptism, symbolizing an act of cleansing and a new beginning for the Israelites. Unsurprisingly, Moses' leadership in bringing his people out of slavery and providing them with a new life perfectly foreshadows Christ's baptism, while also symbolizing the liberation found in the sacramental act as its celebration during Eastertide was a reminder of freedom from Satan's bondage and the ushering in of eternal life.

Similarly, although medieval images of David more commonly depicted him with royal disposition, the rare image illustrating him in the act of killing the bear and lion is associated with Easter imagery. The typological significance of Moses and David in the poem, as was evident in medieval thought, is that they both represent saviours to the Israelites and provide a perfect parallel to Christ,

[11] Rom. 4: 2–5, 11–13. 'For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was reputed to him unto justice. Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned according to grace, but according to debt. But to him that worketh not, yet believeth in him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reputed to justice, according to the purpose of the grace of God. . . . And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the justice of the faith, which he had, being uncircumcised; that he might be the father of all them that believe, being uncircumcised, that unto them also it may be reputed to justice: And might be the father of circumcision; not to them only, that are of the circumcision, but to them also that follow the steps of the faithful, that is in the uncircumcision of our father Abraham. For not through the law was the promise to Abraham, or to his seed, that he should be heir of the world; but through the justice of faith.'

[12] For information on typological references as understood in the Middle Ages see C. M. Kauffmann (2003), *Biblical Imagery in Medieval England 750–1550*. Turnhout: Harvey Miller-Brepols.

[13] See Ex. 12: 31–40 and I Sam. 17: 48–51.

Fig. 2. Isaac's circumcision. Figs. 2 and 3 are images from the Morgan or Malmesbury Ciborium. The object is of English origin and dates to c. 1160. The bowl contains scenes from the Old Testament while the lid contains parallels from the New Testament. Having the New Testament scenes on the lid suggest that the events in the New Testament were sprung from the Old Testament events, thus the Baptism of Christ in Fig. 3 is foreshadowed in the act of Isaac's circumcision in the Old Testament. Although the ciborium is not exactly from the period in which *John the Baptist's Prayer* was written, it does give some indication of how Old and New Testament images were paralleled in England in the early Middle Ages. Some of the images represented on the bowl perfectly exemplify the connection between Old and New Testament events and people in relation to *John the Baptist's Prayer*, and these images provide a fine example of products created in England approx. 100 years after the Exeter Book was compiled. Analysis of the Malmesbury Ciborium was first completed by N. Stratford, who initially made the connection between the images on the lid and bowl of the Ciborium. See N. Stratford (1984), 'Three English Romanesque Enameled Ciboria', *The Burlington Magazine Publications* 126.973, 204–17. Further information on medieval enamels and typology see M. Campbell (1983), *An Introduction to Medieval Enamels*, London: Stemmer House Publications; and P. Strohm (1971), 'The Malmesbury Medallions and Twelfth Century Typology', *Medieval Studies* 33, 180–7. The image is reproduced with permission of the Morgan Library and Museum, New York, AZ 047.

Fig. 3. An image of Christ's Baptism. The image is reproduced with permission of the Morgan Library and Museum, New York, AZ 047.

the Redeemer of all mankind. In addition to the qualities that associate Moses and David with a redeemer, the image of Moses holding up the serpent on his staff clearly foreshadows the Crucifixion (see Figs. 4, 5 and 6), while the image of David slaying the bear parallels the Harrowing of Hell (see Figures 7 and 8). The typological connection between the scene with David slaying the bear and Christ's Harrowing is evident when one examines the purpose of each event. While David, still a shepherd boy, kills the bear to protect his lamb, Christ, likewise, protects His figurative flock and saves them from eternal suffering.

Both the Moses and David images reflect a connection with the Passion that helps reaffirm the theme in *John the Baptist's Prayer*. Whereas both Moses and David had the ability to rescue their people from oppression and save those under their protection, they did not possess the power to redeem them from eventual death and Hell's clutches. However, Christ in the acts of the

Fig. 4. Moses and the brazen serpent plaque. Although this copper and gold plaque is said to be made around c. 1160 and is of Belgian origin, it is a clear example of the prefiguration of Christ in Mosan imagery. Image produced with permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Crucifixion, *descensus* and Resurrection defeated death and brought eternal life, not just to those in Hell, but to all humanity. The named biblical figures are not arbitrarily mentioned, rather they bear a meaningful significance to the poem's main theme and so, as these images provide examples of the typological relationship between Old and New Testament events, they also reveal another layer to *John the Baptist's Prayer* and its connection to Eastertide.

In addition to the Old Testament figures described in the poem are Isaiah and Zechariah, and it is no coincidence that the poet chooses to name these two Prophets in *John the Baptist's Prayer* rather than more commonly named Prophets like Habakkuk or Micah as mentioned in the apocryphal text. Since

Fig. 5. Moses and the brazen serpent from the Morgan Ciborium. A Mosan scene from the Morgan or Malmesbury Ciborium is contained on the bowl, while the Crucifixion scene depicted in Fig. 6 (and presented on the ciborium's lid) provides a visual parallel from the New Testament. The image is reproduced with permission of the Morgan Library and Museum, New York, AZ 047.

the theological focus of the Book of Isaiah is on the return of the Jewish exiles looking forward to the future, Isaiah is credited for announcing Christ's Coming, and in such a way, the Old Testament Prophet's role is not dissimilar to John's as a herald for Christ's imminent arrival firstly to earth and subsequently in Hell.[14] Likewise, Zechariah, the sixth-century BC Prophet, not to be confused with Zechariah, John's father, lived and wrote in a post-exilic world whilst looking forward to the future. The Prophet Zechariah's connection with John is clear and his announcement that the exiles had waited long enough and were soon to be saved echoes Zechariah's biblical message.[15] John points out that Jerusalem's wait is nearly over and the new Jerusalem is soon to be established

[14] Isa. 53; *see* also Luke 3: 4–19.

[15] This is reminiscent of the theological premise of Chs. 12–14 in the Book of Zechariah, which consists of an oracle that foretells the future glory that is in store for the righteous.

Fig. 6. Christ's Crucifixion. An image of Christ's Crucifixion paralleling the Old Testament image of Moses and the Serpent. See also the note to Fig. 5. The image is reproduced with permission of the Morgan Library and Museum, New York, AZ 047.

as he explains: *þurh þīnes sylfes geweald sēcan woldest, / ond [for] Hierusalem in Iūdēum, / sceal sēo burg nū þā bīdan efne swā þēah* (lines 126–9). Whereas the two Prophets in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* quote scripture from their own respective books and create a liturgical-like prayer in response to Christ's Descent into Hell, the focus in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, by contrast, is not heavily reliant on scripture. More precisely, the key figures mentioned in the poem have links to baptism, the poem's main theme.[16]

The poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* abandons another prominent figure from the *Gospel of Nicodemus* narrative in an effort to remain consistent with

[16] In Ch. VIII of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Habakkuk recites a cry for deliverance reminiscent of the passage found in Hab. 3: 13. Likewise, Micah's speech (which is taken from Mic. 7: 18–20) follows with praise to God for His forgiveness.

Fig. 7. The Old Testament scene of David slaying the bear. The image is taken from the Balfour ciborium, also known as the Kennet or Bruce ciborium. According to Stratford (1983), they are most likely of English origin dating from approx. the 1160s; for further information on the ciborium see Stratford. Image used with the permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

the poem's baptismal theme. Whereas the archangel Michael has an important role in the apocryphal text as he escorts firstly Adam, and then the rest of the Old Testament figures to Heaven, he is completely absent from *John the Baptist's Prayer*. The archangel makes a number of appearances in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and he is instrumental not only in ushering the redeemed to Heaven, but also in reaffirming his dual role as protector of humans and agent of God providing instruction to specific men on earth.[17] While Michael

[17] For examples of Michael's presence and role in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* see Ch. XVIII.3–XIX.1, XXV and XXVII.1.

Fig. 8. Christ's Harrowing of Hell. The image is taken from the Balfour ciborium, also known as the Kennet or Bruce ciborium. Image used with the permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

is most celebrated as the leader of God's army in the Bible, it is Gabriel who serves as God's messenger. However, Gabriel is not mentioned in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and Michael assumes both roles in the apocryphal text.[18] As mentioned, Michael is not only absent in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, but Gabriel, by contrast is honoured in an apostrophal passage within the text.[19] Like John the Baptist who is a messenger, John reaffirms Gabriel's role as God's herald

[18] Michael, as angelic warrior, is mentioned in Dan. 10: 13, Jude 1: 9, Rev. 12: 7. For further analysis of Michael and medieval perceptions of his character see D. D. Hannah (1999), *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. Gabriel is mentioned as a messenger in Dan. 8: 15–26, 9: 20–7, 10: 5–12: 13, Luke 1: 10–20 and 1: 26–37.

[19] The entire apostrophe is marked in lines 76–83 of *John the Baptist's Prayer*. It should be noted that along with this apostrophal passage, Gabriel is alluded to in lines 70–4 of *John the Baptist's Prayer* in connection with John the Baptist's armour. See Commentary on lines 69–78.

and praises the archangel's words. John declares: *Ēalā! Gābrihel, hū þū eart glēaw ond scearp, / milde ond gemyndig ond monþwǣre, / wīs on þīnum gewitte ond on þīnum worde snottor* (lines 76–8). Traditionally, Gabriel's responsibility in the New Testament involves the foretelling of John's and Christ's birth, so the apostrophe is a fitting tribute to the archangel's function from the mouth of one he once heralded. This inclusion of Gabriel and exclusion of Michael serves as another reminder of the poem's main theme while diverging from a narrative focusing on a spiritual conflict. Michael, as the commander of God's army, would bring a military aspect to the poem that the poet is clearly avoiding. Although there are certainly martial allusions in the poem, they are mostly used to describe John's physical appearance, while the military language itself echoes the *comitatus* aspect of the Anglo-Saxons' history.[20] The poem is pacific in nature and speaks of a bright future for those willing to partake in baptism. Hence, by eliminating Michael's character the poet diverts attention from the cosmic struggle which is prominent in the apocryphal text, and by honouring Gabriel in the poem, the poet establishes a further connection to John's character and Christ's Advent.

This divergence from the apocryphal text demonstrates the poet's choice to relay more than the *descensus* narrative in verse form, and further illustrates that the selection of scenes, imagery, language, characters, names, and typological references were well considered and work effectively to emphasize baptism. Although the *Gospel of Nicodemus* provides the framework, or the inspiration for the poem, there are so many differences that are too calculated to be brushed off as accidental, arbitrarily chosen, or merely the stroke of luck by the hand of a mediocre poet. There is a conscious motive behind mentioning certain events and people over others more commonly described in *descensus* narratives like the *Gospel of Nicodemus* making the theme of *John the Baptist's Prayer* unambiguous and creating a piece that is undeniably unique.

THE MARIAN ANTIPHON IN *JOHN THE BAPTIST'S PRAYER*, *BLICKLING HOMILY VII* AND *CHRIST AND SATAN*

Set against the backdrop of the *descensus*, the use of antiphonal passages are not exclusive to *John the Baptist's Prayer*; they are reminiscent of antiphons in a number of other texts. In the tenth-century *Blickling Homily VII*, the Harrowing is described in great detail and although it has been established that the *Gospel of Nicodemus* is a direct source of the homily, the antiphonal passages in the text are not present in the *Evangelium* and bear little resemblance to the antiphons in *John the Baptist's Prayer*.[21] Similarly, there are antiphons in the

[20] See also Ch. 3, pp. 71–5 and 79–81.

[21] For further information on the dating of and content in all of the *Blickling Homilies* see Morris (1967). The manuscript that contains the *Blickling Homilies* contains the date 971 written on it. This does not necessary mean that the homilies were composed at the same time, since some contain archaic vocabulary pointing to composition older than the ninth-century. However, despite the fact that no definitive date of composition can be pinpointed, it is most likely that

ninth-century Junius manuscript poem *Christ and Satan*, a poem which consists of a wide breadth of subject matter surrounding Christ's interaction with Satan.[22] The two-part poem's conflated material from biblical episodes ranges from a lamentation by Satan and his followers after the Fall, to descriptions of Christ's Harrowing, Resurrection, Ascension, the last Judgement, and also Satan's temptation of Christ.[23] Although the antiphons praising Gabriel, Mary, Jerusalem and the Jordan River applied by the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* are highly sophisticated passages which add to the numerous qualities that make the poem unique, the antiphons are evocative of borrowed literary techniques evident in other texts inspired by the *descensus*.

As with *John the Baptist's Prayer*, an antiphonal passage honouring Mary is included in both the *Blickling Homily* and *Christ and Satan*, but the voice, tone and purpose of the antiphon reveals a divergence on the part of the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer*.[24] Amongst the biblical figures that speak in Hell in *Blickling Homily VII*, Eve addresses Christ with verbal praise for Mary the bearer of the Saviour. Eve states in the antiphon:

> Ic þe halsige nu, Drihten, for þinre þreowene, Sancta Marian, þa þu mid heofonlicum wuldre geweorþodest; hire innoþ þu gefyldest nigon monaþ mid ealles middangeardes weorþe; þu wast þæt þu of minre dehter, Drihten, onwoce; and þæt hire flæsc is of minum flæsce, and hire ban of minum banum. Ara me nu, min Drihten, for hire wuldres weorþmyndum . . .[25]

Eve implores Christ, requesting grace by asserting her maternal connection with Mary, and using her role as Christ's mother as the vehicle in which Eve can plead the case that she should be saved. There is a long tradition which makes the parallel between Eve and Mary as the second Eve, and the correspondence in the homily is reminiscent of the second-century Church Father Irenaeus's comparison of the two women. In his *Adversus haereses*,

many were written around the same time that *John the Baptist's Prayer* was composed, based on style, language and content. For this reason, it is worthwhile to examine the content of the homily that deals with the Descent in comparison to *John the Baptist's Prayer*, since it not only demonstrates how the two writers approached the *descensus*, but reveals the different methods in articulating the narrative. For further discussion on the dating of the homilies see S. M. Kuhn (1948), 'From Canterbury to Lichfield', *Speculum* 23, 620. While Cramer (1897), pp. 140 ff., first identified similarities between *Christ and Satan*, the *Blickling Homily* and *John the Baptist's Prayer*, Förster (1906), pp. 301 ff. further suggested that the *Blickling Homily VII* was a source for *Christ and Satan*.

22 See R. E. Finnegan (ed.) (1977), *Christ and Satan: A Critical Edition*. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press.

23 Like *John the Baptist's Prayer, Christ and Satan* has been subjected to scrutiny over its apparent lack of unity, however, it is now understood as a two-part poem. For a chronological survey relating to the unity or lack thereof in *Christ and Satan* see C. R. Sleeth (1982), *Studies in 'Christ and Satan'*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 1–26.

24 Cramer (1897), pp. 140–1, first identified similarities between *Christ and Satan*, the *Blickling Homily* and *John the Baptist's Prayer*.

25 Morris (1967), p. 89. All Old English passages from *Blickling Homily VII* are taken from Morris's edition (1880, repr. 1967), pp. 83–96, although all translations are mine. 'Now, I implore you, Lord, for your handmaiden, Saint Mary, whom you have honoured with heavenly glory; you filled her womb for nine months with the worth of all the world; you know that you sprang from my daughter, Lord, and that her flesh is of my flesh and her bone of my bone. Now, honour me, my Lord, for the honour of her glory.'

Irenaeus recalls Eve's impassioned plea for mercy for her daughter's sake in Hell:

> Eva vero inobediens: non obedivit enim, adhuc cum esset virgo. Quemadmodum illa virum quidem habens Adam, virgo tamen adhuc exsistens . . . inobediens facta, et sibi, et universe generi humano causa facta est mortis: sic et Maria habens praedestinatum virum, et tamen virgo, obediens, et sibi et universe generi humano causa facta est salutis.[26]

Through Mary's obedience to God, she has a hand in salvation, so it can be argued that Eve is reflected in Mary, through her co-operation with Adam, who is represented anew through Christ. What the Anglo-Saxon homilist explores is this correlation between Eve and Mary, as he allows the first woman to appeal for liberation through her association with Mary, whose integral role in giving Christ human nature, life and death, ultimately leads to mankind's redemption.

Akin to the homiletic episode where Eve speaks to Christ in Hell is her appeal in *Christ and Satan*, in which she declares to Christ

> Ræhte þa mid handum to heofencyninge,
> bæd meotod miltse þurh Marian had:
> 'Hwæt, þu fram minre dohtor, drihten, onwoce
> in middangeard mannum to helpe.
> Nu is gesene þæt ðu eart sylfa god
> and ece ordfruma ealra gesceafta.[27]

Here again, Eve appeals for Christ's mercy through her connection to Mary, arguing that it is for the sake of His mother that Eve should be rescued from Hell.[28] Not only in the similar message conveyed in both texts, but through

[26] *Adversus Haereses* III.22.4, *PG* 7. 'But Eve was disobedient for she did not obey when she was still a virgin. And even as she, indeed having a husband, Adam, but being nevertheless as yet a virgin . . . having become disobedient, was made the cause of death, both for herself and for the entire human race; so also Mary, having a man betrothed [to her] and being still a virgin, by yielding obedience became the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race'.

[27] *Christ and Satan*, lines 435–40. All Old English quotes from *Christ and Satan* are taken from *ASPR* I, *The Junius Manuscript*, p. 149. 'She lifted up her hands to the King of Heaven, imploring the Lord's mercy for Mary's sake: Lo! From my daughter you were born, Lord, to man on earth. Now is seen that you, yourself are God and the everlasting source of all creation.'

[28] The idea of Eve begging to be saved which results in a dramatic effect within the text is reminiscent of a scene in the ninth-century Anglo-Saxon penitential prayer book entitled the Book of Cerne, which contains a collection of prayers, a Passion narrative from each of the Gospels, and a fifty-five-line dramatic piece involving the Harrowing of Hell. Found on fols. 98*v*–99*v* in the Book of Cerne the *descensus* piece combines both prose and verse, where the former serves as either stage directions or as a series of explanatory notes for the subsequent poetry. In drama and much art when Christ descends, typically Adam and Eve are released, however in the Book of Cerne, the couple must beg for mercy before their liberation. Eve states: 'Iustus es, domine, et / rectum iudicium tuum, / quia merito haec patior, / nam ego, cum in honore essem, non intellexi . . . / Ne avertas faciem / misericordiae tuae a me, / et ne declines in ira ab / ancilla tua!' ('You are just, Lord, and your judgement is unswerving for I suffer this deservedly since when I was in honour, I did not understand . . . Do not turn the face of your mercy away from me, do not in anger shun your handmaiden'). For a critical edition of the Harrowing piece in the Book of Cerne, see Dumville (1972), and M. Brown (1996), *The Book of Cerne. Prayer Patronage and Power in Ninth-Century England*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 145–6.

Eve's literal words, there is a striking resemblance between *Homily VII* and *Christ and Satan*. At line 437 of the Junius poem, Eve says *hwæt þu fram minre dohtor, drihten, onwoce* and similarly, the *Homily*'s Eve character states *þu wast þæt þu of minre dohter, Drihten, onwoce*.[29] Eve voices a tone of desperation and her desire to be rescued plays a large part in the content contained in the Marian antiphons within both texts, as her words recall to Christ that it was through her maternal lineage that allowed Him to be born. Further to the similarities between the messages conveyed in the antiphons, the syntactic similarities offer evidence of a closer relationship between the two texts than one simply based on the message Eve articulates. The similar treatments of Eve's character suggest, as M. Förster first noted, that the *Blickling Homily* was the source for *Christ and Satan*.[30]

Whereas Eve speaks of Mary in the *Blickling Homily* and in *Christ and Satan*, Eve is never mentioned in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, and likewise Mary's voice is silent. John becomes the agent through whom Mary is honoured, as opposed to being mentioned in association with Eve in order to plead for deliverance. Mary is exalted through her involvement in redemption, a theme to which *John the Baptist's Prayer* continually returns. With little more than the mere mention of Mary, no other notable correspondences exist between *John the Baptist's Prayer* and both the homily and *Christ and Satan*. For example, in *John the Baptist's Prayer* John remarks: *Ēalā! Māria, hū þū ūs mōdigne / cyning ācendest, þā þū þæt cild tō ūs / brohtest in Bethlem* (lines 84–6). John's declaration is a clear statement of admiration since *ealle hellwara hergað ond lof[iað]* her (line 123). As with the remaining three antiphons in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, the inclusion of the antiphonal passage to Mary functions as a means to further connect aspects of Christ's life with baptism in a lyrical and invocative manner.[31] By emphasizing Mary's specific role as Christ's mother the passage also connects the scene of the nativity to rebirth made available through baptism.[32] The antiphon reveals a different temperament than that of the homily and *Christ and Satan*, as *John the Baptist's Prayer* suggests a restrained excitement after eager anticipation in Hell, while the anxious appeal in the homily and *Christ and Satan*, on the other hand, denotes a sense of urgency that necessitates Eve's plea. The narrator in *Christ and Satan* states: *ne moste Efe þa gyt / wlitan in wuldre ær heo wordum cwæð*,[33] which in turn suggests to the audience that Eve's salvation and future are at stake. The tone in *John the Baptist's Prayer* expresses a pacific and lyrical homage to Mary, while contributing to the coalescing of baptismal imagery through mention of Mary's womb. Thus, the poem offers a sense of

29 Morris (1967), p. 89.

30 See n. 21 of this chapter. For an in-depth analysis of Eve in Anglo-Saxon prose and poetry see K. Glaeske (1999), 'Eve in Anglo-Saxon Retellings of the Harrowing of Hell', *Traditio* 54, 81–101.

31 By 'lyrical' I mean the genre of poetry that expresses feelings and personal experiences. Much of the poem presents John expressing his feelings, so the poem is more lyrical than narrative.

32 See Ch. 3, pp. 86, 93–4 and Ch. 4, pp. 121–3 and 135 for further discussion on the use and function of the antiphons.

33 *Christ and Satan*, lines 406b–407, 'Eve might not see Heaven until she spoke'.

hope to the audience. On the other hand, the other two texts transmit a feeling of anxiety and tension since the antiphons to Mary are used to convey Eve's concern for what potentially could be her impending doom. This difference in tone within *John the Baptist's Prayer* and the other two texts demonstrates the diversity in the handling of the *descensus* and the specific message that the poet and homilist respectively seek to articulate. *Christ and Satan* and *Blickling Homily VII* closely adhere to the apocryphal source by providing both a poetic and homiletic rendition of the *descensus* narrative which focuses on the battle between Christ and the Devil whilst also elaborating on the episode in Hell. However, the Marian theme is not in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Cramer is correct in asserting the notion that the message conveyed in *John the Baptist's Prayer* stands alone in its rendering of the *descensus* and there is evidently a separate tradition at work in *Christ and Satan* and the homily in relation to the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Whereas Cramer, I would argue, is misguided in suggesting that the main theme in *John the Baptist's Prayer* is the Descent, I am convinced that the divergence from tradition and analogous texts in *John the Baptist's Prayer* points to another primary focus, while the treatment of the antiphon to Mary further highlights the poem's main theme.[34]

ANTIPHONAL SIMILARITIES IN *CHRIST I* AND *JOHN THE BAPTIST'S PRAYER*

Given the liturgical nature of *John the Baptist's Prayer*, it may be useful to examine the poem in conjunction with the Exeter Book's liturgical-like poem *Christ I*, also known as the *Advent Lyrics*. *Christ I* employs the use of eleven antiphons, also known as the 'Great O's' associated with the Advent season; however, rather than adhere to its strict liturgical sources, *Christ I* selects and varies the antiphons in order to elucidate the theme of Christ's coming.[35] While *Christ I* contains several references, either by allusion to or direct indication of the Harrowing, the various references to the motif throughout the text promote the connection between Christ's coming and Christian anticipation of the Advent.

John's plea to Christ in *John the Baptist's Prayer* is reminiscent of an antiphon in *Christ I*, particularly the sixth lyric, which is based on the Magnificat. The Magnificat reads: 'O Emmanuel, Rex et Legifer noster, expectatio gentium et salvator earum: veni ad salvandum nos, Dominus Deus noster'.[36] Similarly,

34 Cramer (1897), pp. 137–47.

35 For a detailed study of the antiphons as a source for *Christ I* see E. Burgert (1921, repr. 2010), *The Dependence of Part I of Cynewulf's Christ upon the Antiphonary*. Washington: The Catholic University of America.

36 'O Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, the expectation of all the people and their Saviour, come and save us, Lord, our God.' This particular piece is the final antiphon of what is called the seven Great Antiphons. One of seven is recited over the week from 17 to 23 December. For further information on the Magnificat see *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. (1913), s.v. 'Magnificat'. New York: Robert Appleton Company. For further information on how the Magnificat was conducted see Cook (1900, repr. 1964), p. xl.

the antiphonal invocation in *Christ I* states:

> 'Nu þu sylfa cum,
> heofones heahcyning. Bring us hælolif,
> werigum witeþeowum, wope forcymenum,
> bitrum brynetearum. Is seo bot gelong
> eal æt þe anum ..... oferþearfum.
> Hæftas hygegeomre hider ...es;
> ne læt þe behindan, þonne þu heonan cyrre,
> mænigo þus micle, ac þu miltse on us
> gecyð cynelice, Crist nergende,
> wuldres æþeling, ne læt awyrgde ofer us
> onwald agan. Læf us ecne gefean
> wuldres þines, þæt þec weorðien,
> weoroda wuldorcyning, þa þu geworhtes ær
> hondum þinum. þu in heannissum
> wunast wideferh mid waldend fæder'.[37]

The core of this antiphon is evident in the Magnificat antiphon, although the poetic elaboration in *Christ I* allows for greater inclusiveness of the audience. Having the Patriarchs in Hell deliver the petition to Christ is somewhat unusual, as the appeal to the Saviour is usually assigned to a particular person.[38] Central to this passage are the words delivered through the collective mouths of the Patriarchs, which make it possible for the Patriarch's petition for mercy to be that of the text's present audience. Though antiphons are inclusive by nature as they function as responses or calls by respondents, this particular antiphon in *Christ I* speaks of a personal and timeless message for the audience, connecting them with Christ's Harrowing and revealing that salvation and mercy can be delivered to all, just as it came to those suffering in Hell.

As has been highlighted, interaction with the audience is likewise evident through John's words in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, adding further richness to the text and giving the words greater purpose and value for the audience as active participants. John states (lines 107–17):

> Nū ic þē hālsie, hælend ūser,
> dēope in gedyrstum, (þū eart dryhten Crist),
> þæt þū ūs gemiltsie, monna scyppend.
> Þū fore monna lufan þīnre mōdor bōsm
> sylfa gesōhtes, sigedryhten god,
> nales fore þīnre þearfe, þēoda waldend,
> ac for þām miltsum þē þū moncynne
> oft ætȳwdest, þonne him wæs āre þearf.

[37] *Christ I*, lines 149b–163. 'Now, You, Yourself, come, high King of Heaven. Bring a life of healing to us, weary thralls with weeping by bitter, burning tears. In You, alone, lies the cure for our excessive hardship. Come to us, sorrowful captives and when you return hence do not leave behind this great multitude, but in a kingly manner, show mercy on us, Christ the Saviour, Prince of Heaven, and do not let the cursed have dominion over us. Grant us the eternal joy of Your glory so that those may worship You, Glorious King of hosts, whom You fashioned with Your hands. In the highest You will remain with the Ruling Father for ever.'

[38] Generally the person who petitions Christ is David as is evident in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, while other instances in the apocryphal text have Mary and Adam making further appeals to Christ. It is John in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, however, who addresses Christ and offers all incantations.

Þū meaht ymbfōn eal folca gesetu,
swylce þū meaht gerīman, rīce dryhten,
sǣs sondgrotu, sēlast ealra cyninga.

John's plea to Christ represents the collective voice in Hell, and this prayer of deliverance, similar to the antiphon in *Christ I*, provides a second level of meaning inclusive of each poem's respective audience. Like the captives in Hell, the audience is held hostage and exiled on earth; thus each invocation to Christ and the inclusion of the audience's single and united voice contains a veiled reference to the captivity of the soul and Christ's redemption through His Advent.[39] Alternating between two moods where one conveys the sorrowful state in Hell, while the other expresses the joy that will come through Christ's aid is reminiscent of the dual moods expressed in the *Christ I* antiphon. This similarity in sentiment emphasizes an emptiness without Christ and is testimony to the idea of spiritual release and fulfilment that He brings to converts.

Both the poets of *Christ I* and *John the Baptist's Prayer* illustrate how the liturgy provided fitting ideas on which poetry could be based. By borrowing some of the phraseology, imagery and structure of liturgical antiphons, both poems are able to convey a similar message regarding the *descensus* which concentrates strongly on the idea of collective suffering while similarly providing a personal message of salvation for the faithful. While *John the Baptist's Prayer* does not delve into the subject by having Christ rescue the Hell-dwellers, John's words provide a message of hope and salvation, similar to that in *Christ I*, which allows the audience, on their individual journeys of the soul, to position themselves with those anticipating imminent liberation.[40]

OTHER TREATMENTS OF THE *DESCENSUS* IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

Unlike *John the Baptist's Prayer*, there are several instances in Old English poetry where the *descensus* is treated with elaborate pageantry and narrative fervor. Turning again to *Christ and Satan*, the episode describing the Harrowing is told with dramatic force and theatrical enthusiasm. The text reads (lines 385–405):

Þis is stronglic, nu þes storm becom,
þegen mid þreate, þeoden engla.
Him beforan fereð fægere leoht
þonne we æfre ær eagum gesawon,
buton þa we mid englum uppe wæron.
Wile nu ure witu þurh his wuldres cræft

[39] See also *Christ I*, lines 358 ff., for a reference to living men held captive and tormented. Their prayer for deliverance again recalls the captives in Hell and likens their literal imprisonment to being held hostage by sin. The imagery evoked through this allusion further suggests the connection between those suffering in Hell and on earth without Christ, while solace can result through His saving grace and mercy.

[40] Further reading on the liberation motif in connection with the Harrowing includes M. McC. Gatch (1981), 'The Harrowing of Hell: A Liberation Motif in Medieval Theology and Devotional Literature', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 36, 74–88.

eall toweorpan. Nu ðes egsa com,
dyne for drihtne, sceal þes dreorga heap
ungeara nu atol þrowian.
Hit is se seolfa sunu waldendes,
engla drihten. Wile uppe heonan
sawla lædan, and we seoððan a
þæs yrreweorces henðo geþoliað.
Hwearf þa to helle hæleða bearnum,
meotod þurh mihte; wolde manna rim,
fela þusenda, forð gelædan
up to eðle. Þa com engla sweg,
dyne on dægred; hæfde drihten seolf
feond oferfohten. Wæs seo fæhðe þa gyt
open on uhtan, þa se egsa becom.
Let þa up faran eadige sawle,
Adames cyn . . .

Within the heroic framework, Christ as liege lord, accompanied by His angelic host of faithful warriors, overcomes the evil lord and his wretched band of companions. Because the dichotomy of good and evil as represented through the characters of Christ and the Devil respectively is an important theme in the poem, it is no surprise that this conflict is dominant within *Christ and Satan*'s version of the *descensus* narrative. In this rendition of the actual despoiling of Hell, the enemy laments his defeat as he watches his captives slip away from him, whilst he bemoans further imminent torture. Thus, the dramatically tense scene is conveyed with deep emotion and descriptive force, as the Hell-dwellers are whisked away from Hell, and Satan is left to mourn his loss at the hands of the *þeoden engla*.[41] This emphasis on the spiritual conflict and the intensity in which it is conveyed suggests that the poet was so deeply moved by the cosmic struggle that he effectively makes that a dominant theme in his narrative of the Harrowing. Because there were no set guidelines in terms of how the *descensus* narrative could be treated, *Christ and Satan* clearly illustrates that different aspects of the Harrowing could be utilized to emphasize a specific point. With the accentuation of the battle between Christ and the Devil, the poem fuses Christian and Germanic elements together, developing the narrative around the cosmic struggle between good and evil as seen through the eyes of the antagonist; thus creating a narrative that would most certainly have appealed to an Anglo-Saxon audience.

Like the *Christ and Satan*-poet, the homilist of *Blickling Homily VII* describes the Descent with intense vigour and poignant intensity. Waiting in Hell, David describes how Christ

> Onsende his þone wuldorfæstan gast to Helle grunde, and þær þone ealdor ealra þeostra and þæs ecean deaþes geband and gehynde, and ealne his geferscipe swyþe gedrefde, and Helle geau and hire þa ærenan scyttelas he ealle tobræc, and ealle his þa gecorenan he þonon alædde, and þara deofla þeostro he ofogeat mid his þæm scinendan leohte.[42]

[41] *Christ and Satan*, line 386.

[42] Morris (1967), p. 85. Christ 'sent His wondrous spirit to Hell's abyss and there He bound and humbled the prince of all darkness and of everlasting death and exceedingly troubled all

As the cosmic struggle between Christ and Satan reaches its climax, Christ's actual Descent proves to be the breaking point by which the Devil is finally defeated. David describes the humiliation that the Enemy receives, even before Christ shatters the gates of Hell, thus further emphasizing that the battle and Christ's victory were at the forefront of the narrative. Christ makes certain that Satan is punished and humiliated before rescuing the Old Testament saints, not because their redemption was a secondary goal for Christ, but because it both added to the drama of the narrative and allowed those in Hell to witness Christ's prime foe receive due punishment. The evocative scenes focusing on Christ and the Devil that are prominent in both *Christ and Satan* and *Blickling Homily VII* reveal a broader focus at the heart of each text. This concentration explicitly explores the details of the Harrowing narrative and highlights the celestial conflict for the soul that concluded on Easter morning through Christ's Harrowing. By contrast, in *John the Baptist's Prayer* attention is averted from the cosmic struggle as the poet condenses allusions to Christ's Descent into one brief line and Satan is altogether missing from Hell. As a wandering exile roaming the earth, the Devil *monigne bindeð brōþorlēasne / wræccan [. . . .] (hē bið wīde fāh), / ne bið hē nō þæs nearwe under nīðloc[an / to] þæs bitre gebunden under bealuclommum* (lines 62–5). The pacific tone of *John the Baptist's Prayer* and the re-direction towards a more personal redemption message illustrates that the poet seized the *descensus* narrative as a means to emphasize baptism. Instead of appealing to the Anglo-Saxon sensibilities with an elaborate rendition of the battle between good and evil, the poet captures his audience by allowing them to work through the narrative towards their own salvation.

Of the many treatments of the *descensus* in Old English poetry, the *Christ II* poem of the Exeter Book provides one of the most elaborate of accounts. As one of the four poems in the corpus of Old English poetry that are signed by Cynewulf, *Christ II*, based on a homily by Gregory the Great, focuses on the Ascension of Christ which includes an episode involving the Harrowing. As the middle of the ternary poems and articulated with notable imagination and poetic dexterity, *Christ II* explores the traditional medieval leaps of Christ, culminating in the Ascension.[43] Typical references to the leaps of Christ were comprised of five leaps including one into the Virgin's womb, into the manger, up onto the cross, into the tomb and up to Heaven.[44] However, Cynewulf added a sixth leap involving Christ's Descent, which the poet placed before Christ's ascending leap up to Heaven following His Resurrection.[45] During the fifth leap, Cynewulf describes the Descent thus:

> Wæs se fifta hlyp
> þa he hellwarena heap forbygde
> in cwicsusle, cyning inne gebond,

his companions and broke in pieces the gates of Hell and their iron bolts, and from thence brought out all His elect; and He overcame the devils' darkness with His shining light'.

43 See Cook (1900, repr. 1964), pp. 143–5, n. 720 and 729.

44 Ibid.

45 Conner (1980), p. 186, identifies Cynewulf's invention of a sixth leap.

feonda foresprecan, fyrnum teagum,
gromhydigne, þær he gen ligeð
in carcerne clommum gefæstnad,
synnum gesæled.[46]

Cynewulf's departure from the five leaps within the medieval tradition cannot be explained away as merely artistic ingenuity, rather it reveals how significant a role the *descensus* played in medieval thought. While this description of the Descent is straightforward enough when it is expressed in the context of the six leaps of Christ, Cynewulf goes on to describe the Harrowing in further detail. At this point, the description of the Descent is out of chronological sequence since it is described immediately after angels descend to earth to accompany Christ to Heaven.[47] Before the Ascent (lines 558–70),

Hafað nu se halga Helle bireafod
ealles þæs gafoles þe hi geardagum
in þæt orlege unryhte swealg.
Nu sind forcumene ond in cwicsusle
gehynde ond gehæfte, in Helle grund
duguþum bidæled, deofla cempan.
Ne meahtan wiþerbrogan wige spowan,
wæpna wyrpum, siþþan wuldres cyning,
heofonrices helm, hilde gefremede
wiþ his ealdfeondum anes meahtum,
þær he of hæfte ahlod huþa mæste
of feonda byrig, folces unrim,
þisne ilcan þreat þe ge her on stariað.

The reference to the Harrowing at this stage is somewhat puzzling and although attempts have been made to rationalize the placement of the Harrowing here, most critics find the speaker's words somewhat troublesome.[48] As A. S. Cook first noted, assigning the problematic passages to angels seems reasonable although the real problem of the passage seems to lie not in determining the speaker's voice, but in the time in which Christ's Descent is presented. The passage prepares the audience for Christ's Ascent and describes angels in preparation to escort Christ up to Heaven. However, just before the Ascension, Christ descends into Hell. Although the timing of the *descensus* is out of sequence, this reshuffling of events reveals Cynewulf's knowledge and use of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*; demonstrating a closer kinship to its apocryphal source. The moral is clear in *Christ II* as the poet imparts two distinct paths for

46 *Christ II*, lines 730b–736a, 'The fifth leap was when he humiliated the Hell-dwellers into eternal torment and bound their king, the hostile-minded advocate of fiends, with fiery bonds, where he still lies chained in fetters, fastened by his sins'.

47 See *Christ II*, lines 555–7.

48 Cook (1900, repr. 1964), pp. 129 ff., suggests that the *descensus* passage which consists of speeches given by angels are 'allied in substance, spirit and general form', however, in suggesting that the same angels deliver all speeches overlooks the fact that it is not the speaker who makes the passage troublesome. The problem with the passage lies in the awkward placement of the description of the *descensus* in the episode concentrating on Christ's Ascension. For further discussion of the disputed passage see Grein (1857–9), p. 164; and also A. M. Jenney (1916), 'A Note on Cynewulf's *Christ*', *Modern Language Notes* 31.2, 91–3.

the audience. This meditative section of the text is not unlike the overriding theme in *John the Baptist's Prayer* which emphasizes both the future glory and eternal life possible through salvation or the shame, exile and torment through denial of Christ's redemption.

Although it is clear that a spiritual battle has taken place, the traditional elements of the *descensus* are absent in *Christ II*. There is no light of Christ piercing Hell's darkness, no discourse from the Hell-dwellers, Satan is altogether missing and there is no mention of the destruction of Hell's gates. Going against the traditional *descensus* motif gives the episode in *Christ II* a similar association to *John the Baptist's Prayer*; however, apart from Satan's presence in Hell, even the latter poem contains most of the conventional components of the Harrowing with restrained brevity. Both poems represent departures from their apocryphal source, the *Gospel of Nicodemus*; yet, what sets these two poems apart from the *Gospel of Nicodemus* is not so much due to the elements of the *descensus* story either borrowed or unobserved, rather the difference lies in the motivation behind their respective handlings of the motif. Whereas the *descensus* episode in *Christ II* allows the audience to visualize Christ in action within Hell and reveals what occurred after He took the Ancient Just out of Hell, Christ's role in *John the Baptist's Prayer* is marginalized so that John's message in Hell dominates.

Christ II focuses on the Ascension, so the Descent is employed to propel the story to its climax whilst conjuring images of a Germanic lord rescuing his troops and removing them from their dire situation. Focus on Christ is paramount and His power and might are championed. He is described as *gæsta giefstol, godes agen bearn* and *ealra sigebearna þæt seleste / ond æþeleste* (lines 572 and 520–521a, respectively),[49] further emphasizing the Christocentricity of the poem and highlighting Christ's supremacy over all. Given the focus on Christ's glorification and the eventual Ascension, the reference to the *descensus* at this point might seem somewhat puzzling, but the purpose of the poem, as Cynewulf states, is to demonstrate the leaps of Christ in order to teach men not to neglect their soul's needs. Cynewulf states (lines 815–820a) that he

> Leofra gehwone læran wille
> þæt he ne agæle gæstes þearfe,
> ne on gylp geote, þenden god wille
> þæt he her in worulde wunian mote,
> somed siþian sawel in lice,
> in þam gæsthofe.[50]

Thus, by presenting the Harrowing in this way Cynewulf achieves the result of conveying the message of salvation for all, even those in Hell, who would eventually find freedom through Christ's liberating act. However, the soul still hangs in the balance in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, and it is left to the Anglo-Saxon audience to heed John's message and allow Christ to rescue

49 'the Saviour of souls, God's own Son' and 'the brightest and noblest of all victorious sons'.

50 'will teach each well-loved man that he should give heed to the Spirit's need, nor pour it forth in pride as long as God wills that he may dwell here in the world, while the soul journeys in the body, within its guest-hall'.

them from their situation. Christ's silence in the poem allows for primary focus on John and his liturgical message, making him and his invocative, baptismal message principal focal points within the text. Whereas the message focusing on Christocentricity in *Christ II* gives a full assessment of His life as illustrated through the six leaps and examines the lengths He took to save all whether in Hell or on earth, *John the Baptist's Prayer,* although not focused solely on Christ's character or actions, conveys a similarly didactic message of redemption to its present audience by suggesting that salvation through baptism is still available.

References to the Harrowing manifest themselves in religious and historical narratives focused on other subjects as well, and Cynewulf's treatment of the *descensus* as evidenced in another of his poems provides a prime example of another treatment of the motif. The Vercelli Book's poem *Elene* provides an account of the emperor Constantine's mother Helen's discovery of Christ's cross. In this narrative, Queen Elene convinces a Jewish man named Judas to find the true cross, even after he is tortured for previously unsuccessful attempts to locate it. After the cross is revealed to him and he presents the emperor's mother with his finding, Satan appears, implicitly suggesting that this new discovery is like the defeat he encountered during the Harrowing. Satan exclaims:

> þis is singal sacu. Sawla ne moton
> manfremmende in minum leng
> æhtum wunigan. Nu cwom elþeodig,
> þone ic ær on firenum fæstne talde,
> hafað mec bereafod rihta gehwylces,
> feohgestreona. Nis ðæt fæger sið.[51]

Satan's lamentation manifests itself as more of the moaning of a pathetically defeated individual rather than an evil lord capable of malevolent destruction. Satan has lost more than just control of his realm and rightful possessions. He realizes that the discovery of the cross will lead more people to Christianity and further reduce his collection of souls. The elaboration of Satan's plight uttered in his own words emphasizes the theological idea that the effect of his Fall was eternal with inevitable punishment for him as a consequence. Although the Harrowing itself is not described in detail, this allusion to the *descensus* is a strong reminder to the audience that anyone who defends the cross achieves a similar victory over Satan that Christ did when He plundered Hell.

While the aforementioned episode involving Satan's lament over the Harrowing is by far the most prominent description of the doctrine in *Elene*, the poem does contain two other small allusions to the *descensus*. In a poetic paraphrase of the Apostle's Creed, the poet describes (lines 176b–188)

[51] This and all other Old English quotes from *Elene* taken from *ASPR* II (1932), *The Vercelli Book*, p. 91. *Elene*, lines 905–10. 'This is perpetual strife. Guilty souls may no longer remain in my possession. Now a man from the other world is come, one who I thought [was] fast in his sin, and he has robbed me of every due and my treasures. This is not fair conduct.'

hu se gasta helm,
in þrynesse þrymme geweorðad,
acenned wearð, cyninga wuldor,
ond hu on galgan wearð godes agen bearn
ahangen for hergum heardum witum.
Alysde leoda bearn of locan deofla,
geomre gastas, ond him gife sealde
þurh þa ilcan gesceaft þe him geywed wearð
sylfum on gesyhðe, sigores tacen,
wið þeoda þræce. Ond hu ðy þriddan dæge
of byrgenne beorna wuldor
of deaðe aras, dryhten ealra
hæleða cynnes, ond to heofonum astah.[52]

The fact that Satan has ownership of Hell and is present there is different from the depiction in *John the Baptist's Prayer* where Satan is subjected to the wanderings of an accursed exile. Like Satan's lament in the previous *Elene* passage, which only alludes to the Descent, this episode similarly makes an implicit reference to the Harrowing; however, the subtle allusion still would have reaffirmed Christ's saving grace made available to the Old Testament saints. The narrative is not so much a personal and inclusive text as *John the Baptist's Prayer* is, and although the *descensus* motif is utilized, the references and connection with baptism function somewhat differently in each poem. Interestingly, *John the Baptist's Prayer* and *Elene* both make the connection between the *descensus* and baptism, but whereas one speaks of a past individual act of baptism, the other speaks of a present invitation. As Constantine partakes in the sacramental act immediately following his vision, readers follow his personal journey towards his Christian conversion.[53] At its core *Elene* embodies a historical narrative illustrating historical figures' individual acts and their personal pledges of faith; however, *John the Baptist's Prayer* is outwardly instructive in nature, allowing the past event to speak to its present audience and inviting all to participate in the same ritual as Christ did with John the Baptist's aid.

Clearly the *descensus* was a significant motif for Cynewulf as he utilized another reference to the motif in *Elene*. Spoken through the mouth of the emperor's mother herself after she gathers the wisest men in Jerusalem and reprimands them for rejecting Christ, Elene states: *Ge to deaþe þone / deman ongunnon, se ðe of deaðe sylf / woruld awehte on wera corþre / in þæt ærre lif eowres cynnes* (lines 302b–305).[54] The simple allusion to the *descensus* is connected

[52] 'How the protector of souls, the splendor of kings, exalted in the glory of the Trinity, and how He, God's own Son, was hung with cruel tortures upon the cross before the multitudes. He delivered the sons of men and [their] mournful spirits from the devil's place and granted them grace by the same symbol which was revealed to himself [Constantine] in his vision, the symbol of victory against the onrush of tribes. And how that on the third day the glory of men, the lord of all mankind, arose from death from out of the tomb and ascended to Heaven'.

[53] Lines 191b–193, *æt þam se leodfruma / fulwihte onfeng ond þæt forð geheold / on his dagana tid, dryhtne to willan* ('Then the prince received baptism at their hands, and from then on, he walked in the will of his Lord during the days of his life').

[54] 'Him you condemned to death who Himself awoke the world from death among the multitude

with Christ's redemption, and Queen Elene's claim is yet another reminder of the purpose of Christ's mission to the Underworld. Although Cynewulf's references to the *descensus* are somewhat masked in ambiguity, they function as part of an overriding theme of salvation and are inextricably linked to the Ascension, which is central to both passages in *Elene* discussed here. The motif is not essential to the narrative; however, it is applied as an instructive tool emphasizing Christ's victory over Hell and the fulfilment of His mission before the Ascent. The examples in *Elene* support the claim that the concept of the Harrowing was familiar in ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England, as is evidenced through the poetry of Cynewulf.[55] He is certainly familiar with the doctrine and treats the Harrowing with restrained confidence as an extension of Christ's Ascension and role in redemption.

In *Elene* the motif functions on logical grounds as the *descensus* is necessary for the Ascension to occur or, in other words, Christ descended before He could ascend. Apart from offering a logical explanation for the Descent, the Harrowing motif is employed by Cynewulf to draw attention to Christ's power and the poet cleverly illustrates this by allowing Satan to articulate his own defeat at the hands of Christ. Apart from the different treatments of Christ and Satan in both texts, what is also important to note in distinguishing the passages referring to the Descent in *Elene* with *John the Baptist's Prayer* is the emphasis on those who were saved in the former and the emphasis on those who might be saved in the latter. Because the examples in *Elene* focus more on the outcome of the *descensus* rather than the act itself, the motif functions as something other than just recounting the event. Similarly, *John the Baptist's Prayer* uses the *descensus* to highlight another message as well. Whereas *Elene* employs the idea to emphasize Christ and His actions, *John the Baptist's Prayer* exploits the location and preliminary scene of the Descent to allow John's invocation to resonate in a manner that would facilitate further Christian conversion. The poem is didactic and inclusive, emphasizing the importance of baptism throughout; therefore the text allows the possibility for readers to decide a fitting ending if they choose to be baptized.

Another allusion to the Descent occurs in the Exeter Book's *Physiologus*, a collection of three allegorical poems named *The Panther, The Whale* and *The Partridge*. Although the classical *Physiologus* model contains more than three entries, the Old English version comprises three records referring to an earth, water and air animal. Christian use of these texts rests in the exegetical readings evident within the *Physiologus* and because the three texts are presented successively in the original classical Greek text, the Old English series is generally understood to have thematic unity representing the nature of God, the Devil and man's choice between the two. In *The Panther*, Christ is allegorized

of men, your own kin, in their former life'.

55 Although dating of Cynewulf's poems and his identity have been debated for more than a century, recent studies by Fulk provide a strong argument that Cynewulf's *floruit* dates to at least the ninth century. See R. D. Fulk (1996, repr. 2001), 'Cynewulf: Canon, Dialect, and Date', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. R. E. Bjork. New York: Routledge, pp. 3–21. See also P. Conner (1996, repr. 2001), 'On Dating Cynewulf', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, pp. 23–56.

through the panther and after being *sneome of slæpe* ('absorbed in sleep, line 42), He awakes from His slumber and His sweet fragrance and sound beckons human and animal, alike, to Him. The poet explains (lines 55–65):

> Swa is dryhten god, dreama rædend,
> eallum eaðmede oþrum gesceaftum,
> duguða gehwylcre, butan dracan anum,
> attres ordfruman. Þæt is se ealda feond,
> þone he gesælde in susla grund,
> ond gefetrade fyrnum teagum,
> biþeahte þreanydum, ond þy þriddan dæge
> of digle aras, þæs þe he deað fore us
> þreo niht þolade, þeoden engla,
> sigora sellend. Þæt wæs swete stenc,
> wlitig ond wynsum geond woruld ealle.[56]

Making a clear reference to the death or *slæpe* of Christ and His Resurrection on the *þriddan dæge*, the poet further alludes to Christ's Harrowing. The reference to Christ's victory in Hell over Satan, the *ealda feond*, adds yet another dimension to Old English poetic imagery of the *descensus*. Not only is the Ancient Enemy chained in Hell, he is depicted as a serpent, who the *þēoden engla* defeats. *John the Baptist's Prayer* and *The Panther* are akin in their representation of Christ as a *þēoden*; however, while the Prince's actions in Hell are emphasized in the latter poem, Christ's dealings are muted in the former poem. This difference lies not in how Christ is portrayed, but in His role in the main theme of each poem which still utilizes His character to convey a similar paschal message. Whereas He is admired for His Harrowing in *The Panther*, it is John the Baptist who praises Christ for His act of redemption whilst urging the audience to participate in the baptismal sacrament during Eastertide in *John the Baptist's Prayer*. John takes this tribute to Christ one step further; thus the poem does not simply convey a message of honour for Christ, it suggests that because of Christ's actions, conversion to Christianity is readily available.

Not only does *The Panther* celebrate Christ's power, the poem combined with *The Whale* and *The Partridge* bears similarities to paschal homilies linked to Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.[57] The connection between the three poems is revealed through the shared theme and homiletic language in which the texts are expressed. Therefore, the structural nature of the Old English *Physiologus* as an Easter homily inextricably links it with the paschal poem, *John the Baptist's Prayer*, and the invocative qualities of *John the Baptist's Prayer* and *The Panther* provide further insight into the inclusive temperament

[56] 'Thus, so the Lord God, giver of joys, gracious of every gift to all other creatures except the serpent, alone, the author of venom. That is, the ancient enemy whom He chained in the abyss of torments and fettered with fiery bonds, engulfed with misery; and on the third day He rose from the secret [place], the prince of angels, Giver of victories, after he endured death for us for three nights. That was a sweet smell, fair and pleasant, throughout the whole world'.

[57] See *Blickling Homily VII* in Morris (1967), pp. 82–3.

and diction within each text.[58] A. Rossi-Reder contends that since 'the majority of Anglo-Saxon homilies commence with *we* exhortations or with references to the homilists' own experiences, introduced by the first person singular pronoun, *ic*',[59] the homiletic language utilized in both texts is very evident. The opening lines of *The Panther* employ the first person plural pronoun *we* as a means of engaging the audience directly and further implies an overall sense of agreement with the opening declaration. The speaker states: *monge sindon geond middangeard / unrimu cynn, þe we æþelu ne magon / ryhte areccan ne rim witan* (lines 1–3).[60] Likewise, John in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, on a literal level directs his thanks to Christ for coming, while the saint also speaks for all mankind, thanking the Saviour for the continuous act of saving exiled souls through His death and Resurrection. John exclaims *þā þū ūs on þisne wræcsīð, weoroda dryhten, / þurh þīnes sylfes geweald sēcan woldest* (lines 126–7). What both texts achieve in using first person pronouns within this context is engaging the audience whilst also offering communal reflection on the final message in a similar manner in which an Anglo-Saxon homilist could include his audience. Just as 'homilists' emphases are almost always didactic, [and] they wish to convince their listeners to lead moral Christian lives, using exhortations and personal pronouns to emphasize these points dramatically and vividly',[61] so too *The Panther* and *John the Baptist's Prayer* utilize the homiletic approach to celebrate Christ's Passion. The homiletic approach to the paschal events expressed within both texts with associated use of the *descensus* motif as a means to emphasize Christ's redemption demonstrates a shared literary technique in *John the Baptist's Prayer* and *The Panther*; both engage the audience in a manner that encourages participation. While *John the Baptist's Prayer* focuses on baptism, *The Panther* leads to two subsequent poems dealing with Satan's and man's choice, thus through the agency of both texts, an Anglo-Saxon audience is led to make a decision concerning their own souls.

References to the Harrowing were not confined to narrative poetry, and the Exeter Book's *Riddle 55* contains a prime example of its usage within other types of poetry as well. Although the answer to the riddle is uncertain, the possibilities are either a sword-rack, weapon chest or a cross.[62] It is somewhat fitting that the riddle's answer is inconclusive as it embodies the mysterious nature of the *descensus* itself and the uncertainty surrounding what exactly transpired upon Christ's Descent. Even though the answer to the riddle is ambiguous, there is a clear reference to the Harrowing in the first half of the enigmatic text. Lines 5–7a state: *ond rode tacn, þæs us to roderum up / hlædre*

58 D. R. Letson first recognized a connection between the Old English *Physiologus* and the homiletic tradition. See D. R. Letson (1979), 'The Old English *Physiologus* and the Homiletic Tradition', *Florilegium* I, 15–41.

59 A. Rossi-Reder (1999). 'Beasts and Baptism: A New Perspective on the Old English *Physiologus*', *Neophilologus* 83, 463.

60 'Throughout middle-earth, there are many creatures whose noble qualities we cannot rightly recount or know the numbers'.

61 Rossi-Reder (1999), p. 464.

62 For further discussion of the riddle see J. D. Niles (2006), *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Texts*. Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 64–84.

rærde, ær he helwara / burg abræce.[63] The brief allusion to the Harrowing is supplemented by descriptions of war, as Christ storms the fortress of Hell's inhabitants. As already established, this integration of battle imagery and the Harrowing was not uncommon in Anglo-Saxon England and provides further evidence of the images evoked by Anglo-Saxon poets when dealing with the *descensus*. Interestingly, by analysing the different examples of the *descensus* as treated by Anglo-Saxon poets, the connection between most of them concerns battle imagery, thus emphasizing most poignantly Christ's power. However, in *John the Baptist's Prayer* expression is much more tranquil, and although Christ's light does shine and He breaks the gates of Hell the tone is calm and harmonic rather than expressing discord and conflict.

The concluding lines of *The Dream of the Rood* contain an allusion to the Harrowing, which again reinforces its familiarity amongst Anglo-Saxon poets and demonstrates its association with the concepts and events of the paschal season.[64] After explicating his vision, the dreamer anticipates eternal rest and happiness with his Lord. He states (lines 148–52):

> Sī mē dryhten frēond,
> se ðe hēr on eorðan ær þrōwode
> on þām gealgtrēowe for guman synnum.
> Hē ūs onlysde ond ūs līf forgeaf,
> heofonlicne hām. Hiht wæs genīwad
> mid blēdum ond mid blisse þām þe þær bryne þolodan.
> Se sunu wæs sigorfæst on þām siðfate,
> mihtig ond spēdig, þā hē mid manigeo cōm,
> gāsta weorode, on godes rīce . . .[65]

Here again, as in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, Christ is on *siðfate*, and the Harrowing is revealed to be a necessary component in Christ's mission.[66] The *Dream of the Rood*-poet here has taken the traditional view of Christ's Descent and condensed it into the three concluding lines which state: *Se sunu wæs sigorfæst on þām siðfate, / mihtig ond spēdig, þā hē mid manigeo cōm, / gāsta weorode, on godes rīce*. Here, the Harrowing immediately follows the Crucifixion in order to liberate, *onlysan*. Just as the statement that *ūs līf forgeaf* is inclusive of the poet, his Christian audience, and those suffering, he further extends the sentiment of redemption to the entire Christian community, while additionally emphasizing Christ's interest in liberating them. There are no earlier references to the Descent in *The Dream of the Rood* although Christ's victory over death connects with these

63 'And the rood that raised us like a ladder, to the high heavens before Christ stormed the walls of Hell'.

64 For further discussion of *Dream of the Rood* see Ch. 3, pp. 69–73. For additional reading see E. R. Anderson (1989), 'Liturgical Influence in the *Dream of the Rood*'. *Neophilologus* 73.2, 293–304.

65 'May the Lord be a friend to me, who suffered here on earth before on the gallows-tree for men's sins; He redeemed us and gave us life, a heavenly home. Joy was restored with blessings and with bliss, for those who endured the fire there. The Son was triumphant on that expedition, mighty and successful, when He came with the multitude, the host of souls, into God's kingdom.'

66 For further discussion of the *descensus* motif and Christ's mission as presented in the *Dream of the Rood* see M. Brzezinski (1988), 'The *Harrowing of Hell*, the *Last Judgment* and the *Dream of the Rood*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 89.3, 252–65.

closing lines, adds to the poem's unity and further reiterates His defeat of death in all forms, even Hell. As with *Elene*, the cult of the cross factors heavily in the narrative, and the association with the *descensus* is used in connection with the cross in order to reassert Christ's supremacy over Satan and death. Although allusions to the Harrowing are not paramount to narratives like the *Dream of the Rood* and *Elene*, the motif is used to conjure further images of Christ's might and triumph over the Enemy. The mood is joyful in the *Dream of the Rood*-poem and similar to the speaker in *John the Baptist's Prayer* who anticipates rescue and the promise of eternal life, the speaker in the *Dream of the Rood* shares this joyful optimism by reminiscing on the Passion and Harrowing.

The miserable and gloomy atmosphere of Hell before the *descensus* is juxtaposed with the joy and hope that Christ brings with His Harrowing in the Junius manuscript poem *Guthlac B*. The Mercian hermit, St Guthlac, whose death is the subject of the poem, follows a discourse on Original Sin, mortality and a final Gospel message given by the saint on Easter. Awaiting death on Easter Sunday, Guthlac's failing health is revitalized temporarily as He describes the Passion in all its glory. The poet explains (lines 1097–1105):

> Rodor swamode
> ofer niðða bearn, nihtrim scridon,
> deorc ofer dugeðum. þa se dæg bicwom
> on þam se lifgenda in lichoman,
> ece ælmihtig ærist gefremede,
> dryhten mid dreame, ða he of deaðe aras
> onwald of eorðan in þa Eastortid,
> ealra þrymma þrym, ðreata mæstne
> to heofonum ahof, ða he from Helle astag.[67]

The description of Christ in the poem cannot be overlooked for it is reminiscent of His representation in *Dream of the Rood*. The Rood explains: *Se sunu wæs sigorfæst on þām siðfate, / mihtig ond spēdig, þā hē mid manigeo cōm, / gāsta weorode, on godes rīce, / anwealda ælmihtig* (lines 150–153a).[68] Here, Christ in His glory is critical to the scene, while emphasis on His saving grace provides a positive message of redemption. Similarly, in *Guthlac B* Christ's heroism is accentuated and as J. Garde argues, the *Dream of the Rood*-poet 'wastes few words on the terrors or the timing of Judgement, stressing only the inevitable consequence of Christ's former merciful act, [and] His approach is generally positive, like that in [other poems as well as] *The Descent into Hell*'.[69] For Guthlac, reminiscing on Christ's Descent and redemption brings hope and energy to the saint, and while his rejuvenation is only momentary this brief restored vigour reflects the power in personalizing the *descensus* story. By reflecting on the Harrowing, Guthlac is

[67] 'The heavens darkened over the children of men, dark nights glided over the multitude. Then the day arrived on which the Living Lord, eternal and almighty, with joy was resurrected in the body, when He arose in might, from out of the earth at that Eastertide, the Glory of all glories, raised to Heaven a great throng when he ascended from out of Hell'.

[68] 'The Son was triumphant on that expedition, mighty and successful, when he came with the multitude, the host of souls, into God's kingdom, the Lord Almighty.'

[69] J. N. Garde (1991), *Old English Poetry in Medieval Christian Perspective: A Doctrinal Approach*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, p. 110.

encouraged by the understanding that his time of everlasting freedom is near. All of his work has not been in vain, because Christ's willingness to descend and save those suffering in Hell similarly suggests that Guthlac's suffering will be terminated and he will be rewarded by being ushered to Heaven as well. This message of hope is, likewise, evident in *John the Baptist's Prayer* especially because John describes his situation in Hell in dire terms. In both antiphons to Gabriel and Mary, John explains severe suffering in Hell. He recalls to Gabriel that *bidan [hiē] þæs longe, / sētan on sorgum, sibbe oflyste* and reiterates to Mary how *hiē þæs beofiende / under Helle dorum hearde sceoldon / bīdan in bendum* (lines 80–81a and 86b–88a, respectively). For the Hell-dwellers, the current situation is miserable and, like Guthlac's suffering, there is an end in sight to their current pain. Whereas Guthlac reflects on those saved from Hell, John is suffering in Hell, although there is an air of hope in his message knowing that Christ has come to free the Hell-dwellers and terminate their torture.

Whether described as a present situation, as it is for John, or upon reflection just as it is for Guthlac, the Harrowing provides relief and hope, suggesting that new life awaits both John and Guthlac. Representations of Guthlac and John as characters in *Guthlac* and *John the Baptist's Prayer* epitomize obedient messengers of God, hence it comes as no surprise that the message to the audience is to follow their example. While the *descensus* is merely a fraction of the narratives contained in *Guthlac A* and *B* and the overriding theme is focused on the saint's life and death, the episode near the end of *Guthlac B* in which the saint describes the Harrowing reveals another manner in which the motif could be utilized. In this case, it is used in connection with revitalizing the saint and providing momentary relief during a bleak situation. Likewise, in its treatment of the *descensus*, the more narrow focus in *John the Baptist's Prayer* re-emphasizes a similar message of hope that speaks to all mankind.

Through examinations of the various treatments of the *descensus* motif it is evident that the more common approach to the narrative focused retrospectively on the Christ-Satan conflict, whilst very often providing poetic or homiletic renditions of the apocryphal source and recounting the scenes of the Harrowing and Ascent to Heaven with imaginative zeal. Though pinned down by Apostolic and Post-Apostolic writers as a secondary doctrine of faith, the *descensus* narrative was still in many ways unclear and imprecise, allowing these Anglo-Saxon poets and homilists flexibility in their treatments of the theme. The doctrine evoked a variety of ways in which the story was told and despite the various artistic and literary renditions that offer fresh and imaginative approaches to the doctrine, its treatment in all artistic capacities demonstrates a deep-rooted familiarity with the *descensus* motif in the Anglo-Saxon period. Notwithstanding the various accounts, they all share the critical message that Christ was sent as a Redeemer for those past and present and this unifying theme allowed poets, homilists and writers to approach the *descensus* motif with creativity. Similarly, the background of *John the Baptist's Prayer* was framed by the poet's well-stocked understanding of the *descensus* narrative. Yet, his diversion from the seemingly conventional

way to describe the event, by condensing the actual Harrowing scene and focusing more attentively on John served more as a launching pad to deliver a message of redemption and salvation through multiple allusions to baptism, which reveals that this message and its association with Christian conversion was of critical importance to the Anglo-Saxon poet.

THE TIBERIUS PSALTER, THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST CARVING AND *JOHN THE BAPTIST'S PRAYER*

The Middle Ages were rich in images of the *descensus*, although the majority of the art reflecting this abundant array of artistic renderings of the Harrowing motif is found in continental Europe, and in England appears after the twelfth century.[70] Although there are several English church-wall paintings, illuminations, carvings, stained glass and sacred objects with images of the *descensus* contained in or on them dating back to the centuries of the Anglo-Saxon period, only one painting on vellum representing the subject has survived. A detailed discussion of baptismal or *descensus*-themed art is not possible in this edition, although the Tiberius Psalter Harrowing image on fol. 14 of the Psalter and the late-tenth-century ivory carving showing the baptism of Christ warrant attention; both are within the Old English period and have relevance to *John the Baptist's Prayer*.

As W. Hulme eloquently claims,

> By the tenth century the story of Christ's Descent into Hades had permeated all Christian literature and art. Very soon after Byzantine reforms had softened the criticism of the Church authorities so far as to allow the person of Christ to be treated as a legitimate subject in art, artists began to chisel scenes of the Passion and the Resurrection on marble and stone columns. And the Harrowing of Hell, usually, and Longinus piercing the side of the dead Christ with a spear, often, had prominent places among their portrayals. Painters in miniature and workers in mosaics and the plastic arts found much inspiration in the illuminated manuscripts and all kinds of ornamental ivory work devoted to Christian subjects that were produced between the 12th and 16th centuries. Artists in enamel and stained glass, and painters in oil were at an early date caught by the magnetism of the scene which represents the victorious Christ with the banner of the Cross in one hand, treading the shattered gate of Hell and Satan underfoot, while He mercifully extends the other hand to Adam, Eve, and the Patriarchs and Prophets and bids them come forth from their infernal dungeon.[71]

[70] See Ch. 2, n. 1, for a select list of critical commentary on medieval art in relation to the Harrowing. For selected studies specifically relating to the Tiberius Psalter see Brantley (1999); K. M. Openshaw (1993), 'Weapons in the Daily Battle: Images of the Conquest of Evil in the Early Medieval Psalter', *The Art Bulletin* 75.1, 17–38; K. M. Openshaw (1989), 'The Battle Between Christ and Satan in the Tiberius Psalter', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 52, 14–33; K. Edmondson Haney (1986), *The Winchester Psalter. An Iconographic Study*. Leicester: Leicester University Press; F. Wormald and R. Maclehose (1962), *An English Eleventh-Century Psalter with Pictures, British Museum, Cotton MS Tiberius C vi*. Glasgow: The University Press; and A. P. Campbell (1974), *The Tiberius Psalter*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.

[71] Hulme (1907), pp. lxiv–lxv.

Fig. 9. The Tiberius Psalter, BL, Cotton Tiberius C VI, fol. 14r. From eleventh-century Winchester, this is one image from a lengthy picture cycle containing twenty-four full-page drawings and two painted miniatures. The cycle of scenes depicts the life of David, followed by the events of Christ's life, an image of the Archangel Michael slaying a dragon and a series of illustrations from a pseudo-Hieronymian letter. The technique used in the illustration demonstrates the late Anglo-Saxon style of vivid drawing rather than use of colour in order to achieve a vibrant image. For further discussion of the Psalter in its entirety see F. Wormald (repr. 1984), 'An English Eleventh-Century Psalter with Pictures', in *Collected Writings*, ed. J. J. G. Alexander, T. J. Brown and J. Gibbs, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 123–37. See also E. Temple (1978), *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts, 900–1066, A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles*, ii, London: Harvey Miller, p. 117. Image © The British Library Board, All Rights Reserved; used with permission of the British Library, London.

Existing medieval artistic renderings of the Harrowing were so central to eastern and western medieval Church thought that it became a popular image among medieval Christian artists to represent Christ's life. As a result His dominance over Satan and Hell became a prominent feature in Harrowing representations. The Tiberius Psalter image provides a prime example of illustrating a victorious Christ defeating the Devil, whilst liberating the Patriarchs and Prophets. Despite the neutral hue of the image, the lack of colour does not diminish the dramatic power encapsulated in the scene (see Fig. 9). Here, a large-scale Christ stands upon a bound and constrained Satan, while He bends down, harrowing Hell and releasing the souls from the mouth of Hell. In this single scene nearly the entire *descensus* story is encapsulated, save for the Ascent, since Hell is harrowed, Satan is defeated and the saints are in the process of being freed. The central eye-catching focus of the illustration is on Christ who simultaneously tramples the beastly Satan under His feet, reaffirming Christ's defeat of death and Hell, and His liberation of the souls in Hell as Hell purges them from its mouth. Compared to the other people in the scene who appear child-like in size, Christ's physical stature is greatly overstated; thus His exaggerated frame and stooped posture reflects a 'powerful but compassionate figure [who] bends to rescue the first parents, Adam and Eve, from the mouth of Hell'.[72] Because the central focus is on Christ and His defeat of Satan, this image is a primary example of standard representations of the *descensus* narrative in Anglo-Saxon England.[73] Furthermore, Eve is not even mentioned in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, whilst Adam is minimized in the narrative, although they are depicted in the image above in their usual way at the front of Hell. Overall, Christ is central to the image and enforces the message of liberation conveyed within, whilst the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* uses the *descensus* motif to articulate and emphasize a different theme.

With the concentration on John in mind, a more appropriate image of representation from approximately the same period in which *John the Baptist's Prayer* was composed is an anonymous ivory carving of Christ's baptism (Fig. 10). In the carving here, the large figure at the forefront is John the Baptist, who is baptizing a young Christ in the River Jordan. Just as the water in *John the Baptist's Prayer* remains still, reflecting the cosmic stasis of the event of Christ's baptism, here too in the carving the water rises towards Christ, voicing its presence and announcing its participation in this Holy event. The pleats and folds on John's garment are skillfully fashioned and chiseled with elegant detail, conveying movement which gives the saint an active feature with life-like mobility. Situated behind John is Christ whose very appearance is more restrained and less detailed, giving Him a more static and marginal role. This is not to suggest that Christ's role is unimportant; after all, it is His baptism. However, it is John at the forefront of the scene, conveying the actions

[72] Openshaw (1989), p. 19.

[73] For a comparative study of the Harrowing image of the *Tiberius Psalter* in relation to traditional depictions of the *descensus* motif in various other art forms within and out-with the Anglo-Saxon period see Openshaw (1989), pp. 19–22.

Fig. 10. The Baptism of Christ. 1974, 1002.1 BM. Composed of walrus ivory, this fragment of a panel from southern England is characteristic of the 'Winchester' style of late Anglo-Saxon art. The 'Winchester' style included (but was not restricted to containing) flowing cloth lines, flowing sea waves and figure poses as exemplified in Fig. 10. It is most likely that the panel was mounted on a book cover or casket, however only this fragment remains of the entire piece. For further information on this carving see D. M. Wilson (1984), *Anglo-Saxon Art*. London: Thames & Hudson. Image used with the permission of the British Museum, London.

through the movement articulated in the artist's sculpting, through John's gaze and in his pose as his entire frame turns towards Christ. While John focuses attention on Christ, He remains silent just as His role is marginalized in *John the Baptist's Prayer*. Yet, while John encourages the viewing audience to focus on Christ, the Saviour's gaze is concentrated on the viewing audience, exemplifying His attention and care for mankind. This image fully encapsulates the core theme of *John the Baptist's Prayer*, as the baptismal echoes throughout the poem draw attention to Christ, who plays a minimal role in the narrative; however, John's message to the audience remain focused on Christ's baptismal act with the overall aim to recognize the soul's need for salvation. Although both text and carving successfully articulate the message of baptism separately in their own respective ways, an analysis of the two pieces together reaffirms aurally and visually the creative manner in which the sacrament could be articulated effectively.

While the single image of the Harrowing from the Tiberius Psalter is a far cry from the narrative in *John the Baptist's Prayer* that craftily understates Christ's Harrowing and concentrates more on baptismal allusions, with John's invocation at the heart of the text, the Psalter image astutely depicts the usual representation of Christ's Descent, and would have undoubtedly appealed to Anglo-Saxon sensibilities in another way. The dissimilarities between the image and poem are not in vain, for the differences force us to examine varied Anglo-Saxon treatments of the *descensus* which, in the end, reveals *John the Baptist's Prayer* in a new light. What the tenth-century ivory panel illustrates is a remarkable resemblance to *John the Baptist's Prayer* in that both 'texts' speak of an event in Christ's life that would lead to Christian conversion, while also subtly delivering a message of hope and salvation with John's voice and actions dominating both sculpture and text.

CONCLUSIONS

Since traditional heroic elements dominated Anglo-Saxon religious verse with grandiose expressions of Christ's Descent, visions of a victorious defeat of Satan and the valiant release of loyal retainers held captive fitted the Anglo-Saxon imagination with its inherent blend of Christian and Germanic practices and concepts. What each Anglo-Saxon homilist, poet, artist and writer demonstrated in different renderings of the *descensus* motif was that he was neither a slave to the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* nor bound by scripture, thus allowing for different interpretations of the secondary doctrine of faith (which was evidently familiar in Anglo-Saxon England) to be represented within each text. What featured most prominently in most Old English treatments of the *descensus* motif was the emphasis placed on Christological images of triumph.

What the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* reveals is that, like other Anglo-Saxon poets, he too was selective in the elements chosen from his source, the *Gospel of Nicodemus*; as he altered characters and words to emphasize a

different message. Even as there is a small degree of borrowing from tradition, he chose to eliminate many specific conventional literary elements, such as stock descriptions of Heaven and Hell, and the commonly presented cosmic struggle. No other Old English poet employs the motif in such a pacific manner as is represented in *John the Baptist's Prayer*. The didactic approach used in connection with Christ's redemption is inextricably linked to Easter and would perfectly suit a narrative of the Passion reflecting wholeheartedly on the good vs. evil lord contrast which is characteristic of most other literary treatments and artistic renderings of the Harrowing. However, the poet of *John the Baptist's Prayer* connects the *descensus* motif with Eastertide in a different way, conjuring images and summoning the use of characters linked to baptism in order to support a message focused on the soul's journey. Certainly the poet does make some use of the heroic tradition as is discussed in Chapter 3 but this application has a purpose other than merely to illustrate Christ's dominion over Satan. At its core, *John the Baptist's Prayer* is a conflation of a scene from the *descensus* narrative. Whereas the traditional narrative has Christ rescuing the souls, in the poem no one is rescued. Thus, audience response to the poem and participation in baptism add to the narrative's development and offer a conclusion to the poem's baptismal message.

Afterword

Central to this edition was the need to rectify misinterpretations of the main theme in *John the Baptist's Prayer* and to question whether a name change might facilitate readings to support the poem's central focus on baptism. I have demonstrated that at its core *John the Baptist's Prayer* is not a poem about Christ's Descent; rather, the main theme is John the Baptist's message of redemption and salvation through baptism. For today's readers titles have become more than labels and they do often function as guides to assist in establishing the theme of a text. The previous title *The Descent into Hell* has led to scholarly misreadings of the poem and, thus, abetted its relegation as an inferior work within the corpus of Old English verse. Certainly the poem has its textual and interpretative problems, but a few troublesome words and phrases along with the folio damage do not obscure its interpretation as a poem about baptism.[1] Renaming a poem is a challenging and somewhat controversial task. Thus, I have not taken this undertaking lightly. Scholarly challenges to the title are inevitable, but given the evidence that suggests that the poem's main focuses are John and baptism, I hope this book will generate critical attention to the poem with a good deal of critical agreement that a title change is necessary.

Further support for my central argument has been provided through various discussions of the didactic function of the poem, as it offered its Anglo-Saxon audience a message of hope for its afterlife. These various readings of the poem suggest that the poem functions on a liturgical level. In tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England, it was not uncommon for sermons during the paschal season to be long and complex, and the short poem that is *John the Baptist's Prayer* offers a compelling and relevant message for Easter with the *descensus* as a background motif. The interconnection between Easter and baptism is close, and this short poem provides a concise summary text, allowing meditation supplementary to a considered sermon before the baptismal rite. What this poem offers is insight into how Christian discourse concerning salvation could be conveyed in a brief, didactic, yet imaginative way.

The messages of salvation and baptism were of critical importance to the poet and his creative method of drawing his audience in and including them would have allowed them to partake in the drama within the poem. Although it is unlikely that *John the Baptist's Prayer* was a staged performance within the

[1] Only one half-line is missing and sporadic words are lost throughout, but enough of the text is comprehensible.

Anglo-Saxon period, there are elements within it that have dramatic sensibility. By evaluating and re-evaluating the language, themes and messages within this text as well as other Old English texts we are able to understand better the development of performance and dramatic literature throughout the entire medieval period. What my investigation also achieves is bringing to light an area of medieval performance studies that has been overlooked. Further studies in medieval performance might reveal that we have failed to see dramatic elements in Anglo-Saxon literature before.

Although I am by no means suggesting that *John the Baptist's Prayer* is the greatest of Old English poems and should be given the critical attention that larger poems like *Beowulf* or the *Christ* poems have received, I have demonstrated that *John the Baptist's Prayer* is indeed a poem worthy of greater critical attention. *John the Baptist's Prayer*'s significance goes beyond its historical value within English literature and its place within the Exeter Book, as it offers much insight into the language and structure used to convey its Christian message. The poem reveals ingenuity and perhaps a peculiarity of mind in its Anglo-Saxon poet, and also brings to light that the poem's first Anglo-Saxon audience and today's readers alike are united in the timelessness of the poem's message.

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S PRAYER

Text and Translation

Ongunnon him on ūhtan æþelcunde mægð
gierwan tō geonge; wiston gumena gemōt
æþelinges līc eorðærne biþeaht.
Woldan wērigu wīf wōpe bimænan
æþelinges dēað āne hwīle,
rēone berēotan. Ræst wæs ācōlad,
heard wæs hinsīð. Hæleð wæron mōdge,
þē hȳ æt þam beorge blīðne fundon.
Cwōm sēo murnende Māria on dægrēd,
hēht hȳ ōþre mid eorles dohtor.
Sōhton sārigu tū sigebearn godes
ænne in *þæt* eorðærn þær hī ær wiston
þæt hīne gehȳddan hæleð Iūdēa.
Wēndan þæt hē on þam beorge bīdan sceolde,
120*r* āna in þære Ēasterniht. Hūru þæs ōþer þing
wiston þā wīfmenn, þā hȳ on weg cyrdon!
Ac þær cwōm on ūhtan ān engla þrēat,
behæfde hēapa wyn hælendes burg.
Open wæs þæt eorðærn. Æþelinges līc
onfēng fēores gæst, folde beofode,
hlōgan helwaran, hagosteald onwōc,
mōdig from moldan mægenþrym ārās,
sigefæst *ond* snottor. Sægde Iohannis
hæleð helwarum, hlyhhende spræc,
mōdig, tō þære mengo ymb his mæges [sīð]:
'Hæfde mē gehāten hælend ūser,
þā hē mē on þisne sīð sendan wolde,

1 on ūhtan] See Commentary.
5 dēað] The second *d* is modified to *ð* by adding a crossbar.
6 rēone] See Commentary.
8 fundon] MS *fondon*, but the *o* is almost entirely erased. Only the top of the *o* remains and a small *u* is written above it.
12 eorðærn] By adding a descender to the stem of the *r*, the original *n* is altered.
13 gehȳddan] MS *ge hyddan*, originally an *n* in lieu of a *y*, but the right shaft of the *n* is scraped away, leaving the stem and arch remaining. A curved tail is added to the stem to form a *y*.
15 Ēaster- / niht] *niht* begins on 120*r*.
18 wyn] The *yn* is over an erasure.
21 hagosteald] MS *ha go steald*. The lower half of the bowl and stem of the *a* in *-steald* is scraped.
25 mæges] Damage to the MS resulted in a portion of the *s* being severed.
sīð] A short word has been lost in the lacuna after *mæges*. See Commentary.
27 hē] *h* is amended from *n*. The original serif is still visible on the ascender.

In the early morning the noble women began
to prepare themselves for the journey; the council of men knew
the prince's body had been encased in an earth-house.
Those desolate women wished to mourn with weeping,
to bewail with lamentation, alone for a while,
the death of the prince. The grave was grown chill,
it was a hard journey hence. Dauntless were the heroes,
that they found at the quiet tomb.
In the daybreak, grieving Mary, she went
[and] she summoned the other nobleman's daughter with her.
The sorrowful two sought God's victorious son
alone in that earth-house where they knew some time ago
that the men of the Jews had hidden Him.
They believed that He would remain in the burial place
alone on that Easter-eve. Something other than that however,
the women then knew, when they went on their way!
But before dawn there came a host of angels,
the joy of the assembly surrounded the Saviour's tomb.
The earth-house was open. The prince's corpse
received the breath of life, the earth trembled,
the dwellers of Hell rejoiced, the young servant awoke,
bold from the earth the majesty arose,
victorious and wise. John declared
to the dwellers in Hell, he spoke rejoicing,
the brave man, to the multitude there about his kinsman's [journey]:
'Our Saviour had commanded me
that He would send me forth on this journey,

þæt hē mē gesōht[e ymb s]iex mōnað,
ealles folces fruma. Nū [is sē fyrst] sceacen.
Wēne ic ful swīþe *ond* wītod, [telle
þæt ūs ic] tō dæge, dryhten wille
[syl]f[a] gesēcan, sigebearn godes'.
Fȳsde hine þā tō fōre frēa moncynnes.
Wolde heofona helm helle weallas
forbrecan *ond* forbȳgan, þǽre burge þrym
onginnan rēafian, reþust ealra cyninga.
Ne rōhte hē tō þǽre hilde helmberendra,
ne hē byrnwīgend tō þām burggeatum
lǽdan ne wolde. Ac þā locu fēollan,
clūstor of þā*m* ceastrum; cyning in ōþrād,
ealles folces fruma forð ōnette,
weoruda wuldorgiefa. Wræccan þrungon,
hwylc hyra *þæt* sygebearn gesēon mōste.
Adam *ond* Abraham, Isac *ond* Iācob,
monig mōdig eorl, Moyses *ond* Dāuid,
Esāias *ond* Sacharias,
120*v* hēahfædra fela, swylce ēac, hæleþa gemōt,

28 mē] MS *mec*, although the *c* is erased.
gesōhte] At the left edge of the lacuna following *gesōh*, the cross bar of a *t* can be seen. Following the 2.8cm gap is *ex* at the right edge of the gap, preceded by the minum of an *i*. Between *gesōh* and -*ex* seven or eight letters have been lost.
28–32 MS damaged. See Commentary.
29 At the beginning of the lacuna that follows *nu*, the top on a minum is evident which appears to be the letter *i*. From *nu* to *sceacen* is a gap of 3.8cm, with 8–10 letters missing.
30–1 A lacuna of 5cm in length and 1cm in height is between *wītod* and *tō dæge*. Between twelve and fourteen letters are missing within the gap.
31 The descender of the *s* in *us* is visible at the bottom of the hole, approximately four spaces to the left of *tō*.
32 sylfa] About two spaces preceding *ge sēcan*, the long descender of the *f* is visible.
gesēcan] The loop of the *g* is evident, although the bowl of the *g* and all but the crossbar's right edge of the initial *e* are missing. See Commentary.
42 weoruda] MS *weorud*. See Commentary.
43 hwylc] The *h* seems to have been wedged in between the *w* in *hwylc* and the *n* in *þrungon* at a later stage. See Commentary.
46 Esāias] There is an ink blot above the first *a* followed by a 0.5cm diagonal ink line trailing down from the blot. The second *a* is altered from *u*. See Commentary.
47 ēac / hæleþa] 120*v* begins.

that He would search for me [after] six months,
the prince of all the people. Now, [time is] expired.
I fully believe and know [I reckon
that for us] today, the Lord will
[Himself] visit, God's victorious son'.
Then the Lord of mankind hastened to His journey.
Heaven's protector would break and destroy
the walls of Hell, the most righteous of all kings
set about to seize the fortress' multitude.
He neither gave thought to helmeted warriors for the battle there,
nor would He lead mailed warriors
to the fortress gates. But thereupon the locks fell,
the bars from those fortifications; the king proceeded in,
the prince of all the people hastened forth,
the multitudes' glorious gift. The exiles pressed forward,
[for] whichever of them might see the victorious hero.
Adam and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
many a great man, Moses and David
Isaiah and Zechariah,
many of the Patriarchs, likewise also, an assembly of men,

wītgena weordo, wīfmonna þrēat,
fela fæmnena, folces unrīm.
Geseah þā Iohannis sigebearn godes
mid þȳ cyneþrymme cuman tō helle.
Ongeat þā gēomormōd godes sylfes sīð.
Geseah hē helle duru hædre scīnan
þā þē longe ær bilocen wæron
beþeahte mid þȳstre. Sē þegn wæs on wynne.
Ābēad þā bealdlīce burgwarena [o]rd
mōdig fore þære mengo *ond* tō his mæge spræc,
ond þā wilcuman wordum grētte:
'Þē þæs þonc sīe, þēoden ūser,
þæt þū ūs[ic sār]ige sēcan woldest,
nū wē on þissum bendum bīdan [sceoldon].
Þon*ne* monig[n]e bindeð brōþorlēasne
wræccan [. . . . .] (hē bið wīde fāh),

50 sigebearn] See commentary.

54 bilocen] MS *bi locen*. The *l* is altered from *b* and part of the bowl is used to make the subsequent *o*.

55 Owing to a hole, a small portion of the descender of the *s* in *se* is missing.

56 ord] MS -*rd*. Only the top right-hand portion of the *o* remains, while most of the *o* is missing as a result of the lacuna that precedes the word on the left-hand margin.

58 MS damage has resulted in only the descender of the *þ* of *þa* being preserved. The descender of *wor-* in *wordum* has also been eliminated due to the central hole in the MS.

60–5 MS damaged. See Commentary for various alternative readings of damaged lines.

60 ūs ic] MS *us*. See Commentary. Following the letters *us* is a hole 2.8cm in length. Between six and eight letters have been lost in the gap.

sārige] MS -*ige*. At the right-hand side of the lacuna, the stem of a letter *g* and a subsequent *e* are visible. Before the *g*, the upper half of a minum is evident, followed by a small piece of a two-shafted letter such as an *m*, *n* or *r*. From what remains of the minum, it appears to be most likely an *i*.

61 Owing to a 3.8cm gap in the line, the right shaft of the *n* in *bīdan* is lost. Between eight and nine letters are missing after *bīdan*, and beyond the gap the ascender of a *þ* and the letters *ō¯n* are visible on the right-hand side.

62 monigne] MS *monige*. See Commentary.

63 After *wræccan* a long descender belonging to the first letter of the next word is evident, and the end of a long descender belonging to either the third or fourth letter is also preserved. The entire gap is 4.3cm with ten to twelve letters missing.

hē] Following the gap, only the top shaft of the *h* in *hē* is visible, although most of *e* is evident.

wide] The descender of the *w* is lost to the lacuna under the word *wide*.

fāh] The *a* is accented.

a multitude of Prophets, a throng of women,
many maidens, a countless number of people.
Then John saw the victorious son of God
come to Hell with royal glory.
Then he, the man of sorrowful mind recognized the mission of God's own self.
He saw the doors to Hell shine brightly,
which long before that had been locked,
concealed in darkness. The thane was in ecstasy.
Then the brave chief amongst the fortress' inhabitants boldly
summoned and spoke to his kinsman before the crowd there,
and with these words greeted the welcome guest:
'Thanks be to you, our prince,
that You willed to seek us out [full of grief],
because we were forced to endure in these bonds.
While [the enemy] ensnares many a brotherless
exile [……] (he is widely outlawed),

ne bið hē nō þæs nearwe under nīðloc[an
to] þæs bitre gebunden under bealuclommum,
þæt hē þȳ ȳð ne mæge ellen habban,
þon*ne* hē his hlāfordes hyldo gelȳfeð,
þæt hine of þām bendum bicgan wille.
Swā wē ealle tō þē ān gelȳfað,
dryhten mīn sē dȳra. Ic ādrēag fela
siþþan þū end tō mē in sīþadest,
þā þū mē gesealdest sweord *ond* byrnan,
helm *ond* heorosceorp, ā ic þæt hēold nū gīet;
ond þū mē gecȳðdest, cyneþrymma wyn,
þæt þū mundbora mīnum wǣre.
Ēalā! Gābrihel, hū þū eart glēaw *ond* scearp,
milde *ond* gemyndig *ond* monþwǣre,
121*r* wīs on þīnum gewitte *ond* on þīnum worde snottor.
Þæt þū gecȳðdest þā þū þone cnyht tō ūs
brōhtest in Bethlem. Bidan wē þæs longe,
sētan on sorgum, sibbe oflyste,
wynnum *ond* wēnum, hwonne wē word godes
þurh his sylfes mūð secgan hȳrde.
Ēalā! Māria, hū þū ūs mōdigne
cyning ācendest þā þū þæt cild tō ūs
brōhtest in Bethlem. Wē þæs beofiende
under helle doru*m* hearde sceoldon

64 nīðlocan] A hole has caused most of the *c* in *nīðlocan* to be lost, and only the descending strokes of *-an* are visible. Between what is left visible of the letters *-an* and the end of the line is a gap of 2.1cm, and the end of a descender or a tail of a letter from a small word between two and four letters long is preserved.

66 þȳ] The þ is only missing a small portion of its ascender; however only the tail of the *ȳ* remains and its ascending strokes have been lost to the hole following the word.

68 See Commentary.

70 ādrēag] The first *a* is accented.

74 þū] *þ* was originally an *h*.

78 gewitte / ond] Fol. 121*r* begins.

79 gecȳðdest] MS *ge cyðdest* with the cross-stroke of the *ð* omitted by the scribe.

cnyht] *h* is altered from *n*. The original serif is still visible, but an ascender has been added.

81 sētan] MS *set / tan*, the first *t* is erased.

oflyste] *s* is altered from an *f* with the horizontal stroke scraped away.

87 under helle dorum] Over an erased area.

dorum] MS *doru*. The scribe may have left off the macron sign indicating that the word is *dorum*. For further remarks see Commentary to line 87, and Ch. 1, p. 26.

he is not bound so closely in the place of torment
nor cruelly under painful bonds,
that he then may not easily acquire courage,
when he trusts in his Lord's grace
that He will redeem him from those bonds.
In this way, we all trust in You alone
my dear Lord. I have endured much
since you previously journeyed to me
when you gave me a sword and breastplate,
a helmet and warlike dress, that I still now constantly held;
and You made known to me, joy of royal majesties,
that You would be my protector.

Oh! Gabriel! How you are clear-sighted and keen,
generous and thoughtful and courteous,
wise in your understanding and sagacious in your speech.
That you made known when you brought that boy
to us in Bethlehem. So long we waited,
resided with sorrows, desirous for peace,
joys and hopes, [as to] when we would have heard
God's word spoken from His own mouth.

Oh! Mary! How brave a king
you bore for us when you brought forth that child
to us in Bethlehem. Then, we trembling
beneath the gates of Hell, were forced painfully

bīdan in bendum. Bon[a] weorces gefeah;
wæron ūre ealdfīnd ealle on wynnum
þon*ne* hȳ gehȳrdon hū wē hrēowen[de
mænd]on, murnende, mægburg ūsse,
oþþæt [þū sōhtest, s]igedryhten god,
bimengdes[t . . . . mōdi]gast ealra cyninga.
. . . . . nū ūs mon mōdge þē
āgeaf from ūsse geōgoðe. Wē þurh gīfre mōd
beswīcan ūs sylfe; wē þā synne forþon
berað in ūrum brēostu*m* tō bonan honda;
sculon ēac tō ūssum fēondu*m* freoþo wilnian.
Ēalā! Hierusalem in Iūdēum,
hū þū in þære stōwe stille gewunadest!
Ne mōstan þē geondfēran foldbūende
ealle lifgende þā þē lof singað.
Ēalā! Iordāne in Iūdēum,
hū þū in þære stōwe stille gewunadest.
Nales þū geondflōwan foldbūende,
mōstan hȳ þȳnes wætres wynnum brūcan.
Nū ic þē hālsie, hælend ūser,
dēope in gedyrstum (þū eart dryhten Crist),
121*v* þæt þū ūs gemiltsie, monna scyppend.
Þū fore monna lufan þīnre mōdor bōsm
sylfa gesōhtes, sigedryhten god,
nales fore þīnre þearfe, þēoda waldend,
ac for þā*m* miltsum þē þū moncynne
oft ætȳwdest, þon*ne* him wæs āre þearf.

88 bona] The *a* has been damaged by the hole following the word.

89 wynnum] Only the first two descenders are preserved, owing to the hole that interferes with this line and the line above it.

90–5 MS damaged. See Commentary.

94 MS damaged. A hole of approx. 6.5cm extending from the left-hand margin past the middle of the folio has made much of this line indiscernible. Three spaces before *nu* at the right edge of the gap, the tail of a descender is evident.

ūs] MS *us ic*, with *ic* erased.

95 from] MS damaged. Although the *o* and *m* are evident, only the descender of the *f* is preserved, and the arch of the *r* is missing.

96 ūs] MS *us ic*, but *ic* is erased.

101 þē] MS *þec*, but *c* is erased.

107 þē] MS *þec*, but *c* is erased.

108 Crist / þæt] Fol. 121*v* begins.

to abide in bonds. The destroyer relished [his] work;
our ancient enemies were all in ecstasies
when they heard how we repenting,
mourned, lamenting our race,
until [you searched], God, lord of victory,
You united with us . . . . . bravest of all kings.
[. . . . .] now you gave us
our brave one from infancy. By our covetous spirit
we deceived ourselves, therefore we released those
sins in our hearts into the enemy's hands,
moreover, to our foes we are forced to beg for peace.
Oh! Jerusalem in Judaea!
How you remained fixed in that place!
Not all living dwellers on the earth
who sing praise to you may traverse you.
Oh! Jordan in Judaea!
How you remained still in that place.
By no means you flow among the dwellers of the earth
[that] they might enjoy the delights of your water.
Now, deep in tribulations, I pray to You,
our redeemer (You are Christ, the Lord),
that You might show mercy to us, creator of men.
For the love of men You, Yourself, sought
Your mother's womb, God, lord of victory,
by no means for Your [own] need, ruler of the nations,
but because of the mercies that You have often
revealed to mankind, when it was in need of grace.

Þū meaht ymbfōn eal folca gesetu,
swylce þū meaht gerīman, rīce dryhten,
sǽs sondgrotu, sēlast ealra cyninga.
Swylce ic þē hālsige, hǽlend ūser,
fore [þ]īnum cildhāde, cyninga sēlast,
ond fore þǽre wunde, weoruda dry[hten
ond for] þīnum ǽriste, æþelinga wyn,
ond fore þīnre mē[der . . . Mā]rian nama,

117 ealra] Owing to the hole preceding *ealra*, all but the upper-right part of the arch of the *e* are missing.
118 þē] MS *þec*, but *c* is erased.
119 þīnum] MS damaged. The hole preceding the line has caused most of the *þ* to be destroyed. Only the tail-end of the descending stroke remains.
119–24 MS damaged. See Commentary.
120 wunde] *n* is over an erased letter that contained an ascender.
dryhten] The *dr-* is preserved, but is followed by a gap of 3.2cm with seven to eight letters missing.
121 ond for þīnum] Following the gap, only a fragment of the *r* is preserved, and the descender of the *þ* has been lost.
122 mēder] MS *me*. The *me* is visible, followed by the lower left-hand bowl of a *d*. This is followed by a gap of 4.6cm, with around eleven to thirteen letters missing.
Mārian] At the right edge of the gap, the *-ian* is preserved, preceded by the arch of an *r* or *n*. Before that letter, the upper-left edge of what appears to be an *a* is visible.
nama] See Commentary.

You are able to embrace all the habitations of peoples,
likewise, mighty Lord, most excellent of all kings,
You are able to count the sea's grains of sand.
Moreover, I pray to You, our redeemer,
by Your childhood, most excellent of kings,
and by that wound, lord of hosts
and by Your resurrection, joy of princes,
and by Your mother [. . . .] Mary by name,

þā ealle hellwara hergað *ond* lof[iað],
ond fore þam] e[n]glum þē þē ymb stondað,
þā þū þē lēte sittan [on þā swīþran] hond.
Þā þū ūs on þisne wræcsīð, weoroda dryhten,
þurh þīnes sylfes geweald sēcan woldest;
ond [for] Hierusalem in Iūdēum,
sceal sēo burg nū þā bīdan efne swā þēah,
þēoden lēofa, þīnes eftcymes;
ond for Iordane in Iūdēu*m*,
wit unc in þǣre burnan baþodan ætgædre,
oferwurpe þū mid þȳ wætre, weoruda dryhten,
blīþe mōde ealle burgwaran'.
Swylce git Iohannis in Iordane,
mid þȳ fullwihte, fægre onbryrdon
ealne þisne middangeard, sīe þæs symle meotude þonc!

123–5 lofiað] MS damage has resulted in the ascender of the *f* being lost. Immediately following the *f* is what appears to be a minum which is most likely an *i* followed by the top-edge of a rounded letter, most likely an *a*. A 6.1cm gap follows with approximately 14 to 17 letters missing.
124 ond fore þam] Approximately 1cm and 1.2cm into the gap, the tails of two descenders are visible. The descenders are most likely fragments of the symbol for *ond* and the *f* of *for(e)*.
englum] At the right edge of the gap is *-lum*. The lower halves of the *l* and *u* are missing. Preceding it, the crossbar of the *e*, the serif of the *n* and the cross bar of the *g* are visible. See Commentary.
þē (2nd)] MS *þec*, but the *c* is erased.
125 sittan] The right portion of the arch in the *n* is missing owing to MS damage. The proceeding 5.5cm gap reaches the end of the MS, with about fourteen to seventeen letters lost. The lower portions of four descenders are visible 1.3cm, 2.1cm and 2.7cm after *sittan*. See Commentary.
126 ūs] MS *us ic*, but *ic* is erased.
128 for] MS ⁊*hierusalem*, with the word *for* omitted.
129 þēah] MS *þēan*. See Commentary.
132 unc] Preceded by an erased letter.
baþodan] *-dan* is over an erasure.
137 Punctuation: · :7 A long space separates the last word in the text and the punctuation (1cm), although a full-stop stands 0.4cm after *þonc* and 0.6cm before :7.

who all of the dwellers of Hell extol and exalt,
and by the angels that abide around You,
that You may allow to sit by Your right hand.
Thereupon You, through Your own accord, intended to search
for us in this journey of exile, lord of hosts;
and for Jerusalem in Judaea,
that city now likewise must wait just now
Your return, beloved prince;
and by the Jordan in Judaea
You and I, we two bathed together in that river,
with the water You besprinkled all the multitudes
in gracious spirit, lord of hosts.'
    Just as You and John in the Jordan,
by Your baptism, beautifully inspired
this entire world, for this may thanks be to God for ever!

Commentary

1 him] Some early critics found *him* troublesome in context with the rest of the line owing to its usual translation as a masculine pronoun, although in this case the subject is feminine plural. To explain the pronoun's case in the text, Cramer (1897), p. 159, proposes the word *hī*, while Cosijn (1898), p. 127, suggests *hīe*. *ASPR* III, p. 356, suggests that *him* may very well have been the poet's intended word. Because *him* may simply refer to 'themselves', that is the 'women' at the beginning of the poem, consequently I have retained *him* as it makes sense in this context. See Cosijn (1898).

on ūhtan] According to Conner (1980), p. 183, based on the terms *on ūhtan* and *on dægrēd* (line 9) there is a distinction in time between when the women began their journey and when the host of angels surrounded Christ's tomb. The difference between *ūhtan* and *dægrēd* was that *ūhtan* occupied the time of morning just before the sun was visible, whereas *dægrēd* was the time of dawn when the light was evident. Izydorczyk (1990, 439–47) discusses the temporal sequence of the Descent and the Resurrection in both the biblical and patristic tradition, and further addresses the implicit inversion of the events within the poem as demonstrated in lines 1, 9 and 17 of *on ūhtan*, *dægrēd* and *on ūhtan*. Izydorczyk contends that the poet inverts the paschal events because his 'ways of thinking about redemption . . . [were] approached in a loosely typological ahistorical manner' (442), and that the 'precedence for the postponement of the Descent until after the Resurrection may have been set in I Pet. 3: 18–19'. See also the section on time above (pp. 60–8), and Commentary on line 17. The use of *on ūhtan* is used to describe the onset of an event or something becoming visible at dawn in other Old English texts. According to the *DOE*, there are twenty-two other instances of *on ūhtan*, ten of which are found in Old English poetry. In *Genesis A* (line 313) the fallen angels are met with a harsh cold *on ūhtan*. Two instances of *on ūhtan* in *Andreas* (lines 235 and 1388) describe St Andrew, firstly setting out at dawn on instruction from God and secondly being harassed by a group of heathens. In *Elene* (line 105) Constantine orders his army into action *on ūhtan*, while in *Beowulf* (line 126) Grendel was made visible to the Danish thanes *on ūhtan*. In the *Wife's Lament* (line 33) the speaker describes being alone *on ūhtan* while her friends enjoy eternal peace. In *Christ and Satan* (line 403) Christ defeats Satan *on ūhtan*, and in the same poem (line 463), Christ breaks down Hell's gates *on ūhtan*. The scene in *Christ and Satan* shares an interesting connection to *John the Baptist's Prayer* as both poems describe Christ harrowing Hell in the early morning just before daybreak. Both texts use *on ūhtan* and *dægrēd* to specify the exact moment of the Harrowing.

2 gierwan] Cosijn (1898), p. 127, suggests that the phrase *gierwan to geonge* is the equivalent of *gongan*, since *ongunnon him* (line 1) . . . *gongan* has several parallels throughout the corpus of Old English literature. See *Genesis A* (line 1880), *Dream of the Rood* (lines 65, 67), Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, IV, 26.354.32.

wiston gumena gemōt] Cosijn (1898), p. 127, takes *æþelcunde mægð* (line 1b) as the subject of *wiston*, and further suggests that an entire verse is lost after line 2 or, at the very least, *gemōt* is corrupt. Holthausen (1907), p. 200, proposes *þurh* after *wiston*. Trautmann (in Cramer 1897, p. 159) recommends that the simplest reading involves no alteration to the text, translating *gumena gemōt* as 'the gathering of people' and the subject of *wiston*. This reading is supported in *ASPR* III, p. 356. Mackie (1934), p. 173, translates the half-line as 'the men, met in the assembly, knew . . .', although a simpler translation which stays truer to the text in its present form is 'the council of men knew . . .'. This rather abrupt transition in line 2 which shifts from a description of the women in preparation for their journey to the council of men, on the other hand, reflects the differing reactions to Christ's death between the men and women. This juxtaposition between the two groups is reflected in their responses to Christ's death, as the disciples gathered together to mourn with the certainty of Christ's death and burial, while the women who *wiston* (*John the Baptist's Prayer*, line 12) Christ was in the tomb would rather go and mourn there. See the subsection on time in Ch. 3, pp. 60–8.

6a rēone] Both Thorpe (1842), p. 459, and Mackie (1934), p. 178, take the word as an adverb and translate it 'sadly' and 'bitterly', respectively. Cramer (1897), p. 148, adopts the emendation *rēonge* as a form of the adjectival *rēonig*, meaning 'sad' or 'gloomy'. This reading is accepted in *ASPR* III, pp. 219 and 356, where it is further noted that *rēone* is not recorded elsewhere as a noun. Bradley (1982), p. 392, keeps the original word *rēone*, translating it as 'lamentation', from *rēon*, whereas Muir (2000), p. 341, emends to *rēonge*. Although the previous editorial emendation from *rēone* to *rēonge* is perfectly acceptable in terms of context, *rēone* translated as '[with] mourning' or 'lamentation' is not problematic, and although previously suggested editorial emendations would not affect the alliteration or metre, in instances like this where the manuscript does not necessitate emendation for understanding, alliteration or metre, it is reasonable to leave the text as it has been preserved on the leaf. See Ch. 1, pp. 24–6, for additional analysis of *rēone*.

6b Ræst wæs ācōlad] Muir points out that *wæs ācōlad* meaning 'growing cold' (2000), p. 678, is used to describe both the resting-place and the corpse; cf. *Dream of the Rood*, line 72b, *hrǣw cōlode*. Following Grein's translation: 'Voll schrecken war die Ruhstatt' (1857), p. 195, meaning 'with full horror was that resting place', Cramer further reads *ācōlad* as *geāclad*, thus suggesting that 'the resting-place had grown cold (because the body was no longer present), so the journey [that was] (death) had been difficult' (1897), p. 148. The reading in *ASPR* III, p. 356, suggests that the manuscript reading may be correct as it is, although uncertainties in the relationship between the clauses in lines 6b and 7a make it difficult to establish a definite interpretation of *ācōlad* and the subsequent half-line following it. The phrase carries a twofold interpretation describing how both the body and burial

place had 'grown chill', while also drawing parallels between the journey to death and the women's journey to the tomb. Thus, the manuscript reading may very well be correct without having to alter the text. This emphasis on the difficult journey further stresses the point that the women, by proxy, are representatives of the audience who are on the road to salvation and that journeying is not always easy.

7b–8 Two interpretations of these lines have been proposed previously. Firstly, Holthausen (1908), pp. 49 ff., takes *beorge* as referring to Golgotha, *blīðe* as a reference to Christ, and *hæleð* as an allusion to Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (see John 19: 38–40), while a second interpretation is suggested by E. A. Kock (1921), 'Interpretations and Emendations of Early English Texts: VIII', *Anglia* 45, 105–31. Kock (127) argues that *beorge* refers to the sepulchre, *hæleð* as the angels that the women found at the tomb, while *blīðne* is emended to the nominative plural *blīðe*, referring to the 'women mild' who were at the grave. Anderson (1986, 210–11) accepts Kock's emendation, while Mackie (1934), pp. 172–3, reads *blīðe* as accusative plural. *ASPR* III, p. 356, argues that the occurrence of *beorge* in line 14 makes 'sepulchre' feasible in line 8 and supports the emendation to *blīðe*; and Muir (2000), p. 678, supports the reading put forth in *ASPR*. Thorpe (1842), p. 459, suggests altering *blīðe* to *belidne* or *belidenum*, translating the line to 'whom they at the deserted sepulchre found'. Shippey (1976) states that 'the poet is trying to imitate in his language the women's overpowering surprise with this jovial chiasmus' (p. 38). He further argues that *hæleð* is an unusual word used to describe the angels' proclamation; however, he argues that it is used not only to emphasize the mourners' amazement, but serves as an invitation for the poem's audience to share in the experience of Christ's Resurrection. It is reasonable to suggest *blīðne* can be emended to *blīðe* by following the context of the previous and subsequent lines. So, *hæleð* would be understood in the context as most likely representing the angels who were joyful where the mourning women would find them at the *beorge*. However, I suggest that *blīðne* need not be amended at all if one takes the word as an adjective meaning 'quiet, peaceful or calm' (see *DOE*). The dauntless heroes that the women found had surrounded the 'quiet' tomb. This is a clear juxtaposition with the trembling earth in line 20, but also emphasizes that by the time the women arrived at Christ's sepulchre it was empty. See Ch. 1, p. 25.

8 blīðne fundon] Cramer (1897), p. 170, inappropriately amends this to *blīðne friþodon*. It is evident that the letter *u* in *fundon* is a subsequent correction of an *o*, so there is nothing in the text that requires the introduction of a completely new word, such as *friþodon*. There is no way to tell whether it was the same scribe who later added the superscript *u* or another hand, although it is evidently a correction, nevertheless. Conner (1980), p. 182, provides a convincing interpretation that the emphasis on the Marys' intense grief as emphasized in lines 4–8 foreshadows the mystery they 'would find' at the tomb.

17 Ac] The word introduces a contrast in mood from the weeping women, as representatives of humanity in its sorrow, who set out at dawn (line 9), in contrast to the angels, who at exactly the same time blissfully arrange themselves around Christ's tomb.

on ūhtan] Conner (1980), p. 183, notes that *on ūhtan* here harks back to line 1, indicating the time in which the angels descended to earth and the women simultaneously set forth to visit the sepulchre. See also Commentary on line 1.

22 mægenþrym] Cosijn (1898), p. 127, proposes an emendation to *mægenþrymme*, although, as *ASPR* III, p. 356, and Muir (2000), p. 678, note, the alteration is unnecessary since *mægenþrym* refers to Christ. On the meaning of the term *mægenþrym*, which normally denotes the abstract quality 'power' or 'majesty', it is here used synecdochically to refer to Christ as the possessor of power or majesty. See D. Cronan (2003), 'Poetic Meanings in the Old English Poetic Vocabulary', *English Studies* 5, 408.

25 mæges [sīð]] Anderson (1986), pp. 636–40, contends that *mæg* has the 'semantic duplicity of all good riddle-words' (637), and could refer to either Adam, Christ's kinsman in the ancestral sense, or John the Baptist, as a contemporary blood-relative in the Germanic sense. Although Anderson acknowledges the manuscript damage after *mæges*, he makes no further comment. See also Commentary to lines 50 and 56. See Assmann (1898). Schipper (1874), p. 334, Cramer (1897), p. 162, Assmann (1898), p. 176, and Mackie (1934), p. 173, restore *sīð* after *mæges*, because the amount of space on the manuscript would only allow for no more than three letters. *ASPR* III further contends that *sīð* is 'the only plausible reconstruction' (356–7). Thorpe (1842), p. 460, notes the damage, but provides no other observations. The manuscript leaves room for a word that would contain no more than three letters at the most. Previous scholarly recommendations that the missing word is *sīð* are very probable. Not only does *sīð* suit the physical confines of the lacuna, but it works in context with the rest of the line describing the commencement of John's speech to the dwellers in Hell.

27 on þisne sīð] Holthausen offers two readings, firstly, *on sīð þisne* (1907), p. 200, which is a reversal of words on the manuscript leaf, or alternatively, *on þisne sīð*[*fæt*] (1935), p. 10. Although Holthausen does not offer details about his alternative readings, his first suggestion implies that the reversal of *on þisne sīð* to *on sīð þisne* might identify clearly the alliteration of *s* in the on-verse with *sendan* in the off-verse. Also, the addition of *fæt* would add an extra unstressed syllable to line 27a, but the addition is unnecessary, as the half-line already contains two accented syllables and is metrically adequate as all of the lines in the poem contain either two or three accented syllables. There is no indication on the manuscript that *fæt* was omitted and the text makes sense as it stands.

28 gesōht[e ymb s]iex] Holthausen (1894), p. 384, Cramer (1897), pp. 162, 171, Assmann (1898), p. 176, and Mackie (1934), p. 172, reconstruct the half-line to read: *gesōhte ymb siex*. *Ymb* seems to be suitable in terms of context and also fits when the spaces on the manuscript are taken into consideration.

s]iex mōnað] Literally translated as 'month six'. The scriptural basis for the concept of the six-month period between John and Christ's birth comes from the reference in Luke 1: 36. Shippey (1976) points out that 'the traditional date of the Decollation of John is August the 29th, rather more than six, though slightly less than seven

months before the traditional date of the Crucifixion, Mar. 25th' (p. 140, n.3). In any case, the poet was most certainly familiar with the traditional timeframe between John and Christ's death and Descent which is employed in the text. See also subsections on time (pp. 60–8) and liturgical influence (pp. 84–91) in Ch. 3.

29 is sē fyrst] Holthausen (1894), p. 384, Assmann (1898), p. 176, Mackie (1934), p. 172, and Muir (2000), p. 342, reconstruct the line in this way because small fragments of letters surrounding the lacuna offer some indication of the missing words. Cramer (1897), p. 162, proposes *nū* [*sē fyrst is*] *sceacen* as a possible reconstruction. Close examination of the left-most edge of the hole that follows *nū* indicates that there appears to be a minum that could be an *i*. If that is the case, *is* might very well be the missing word. Considering the syntax, context and corresponding alliteration of the line in question, the most plausible reading would be *is sē fyrst*, which also seamlessly fills the hole on the folio when reconstructed.

mē] There are several instances within the text in which the letter *c* is erased from pronouns. In context *mē* is dative, so whether with or without the *c* either form, *mē* or *mēc*, is perfectly acceptable because neither case changes the meaning of each respective line where *mē* is altered. Apart from this one instance, other occurrences in which *c* is erased seem to appear most often in clusters (*John the Baptist's Prayer*, lines 95, 97, 102 and 108 on fol. 121r and lines 119, 125, 127 on fol. 121v). Each instance is either *ūs[ic]* or *þē[c]* where the dative form is used. Whether the scribe made these deletions or whether they were made by someone else is unclear, especially since the only other instances within the Exeter Book occur in *Soul and Body*. However, as is noted in Ch. 1, nn. 29 and 33, Megginson's (1992), pp. 200–1, claim (supported by Muir 2000, p. 38) that the *-c* forms were made to distinguish between accusative and dative forms makes it doubtful that the scribe made the erasures himself. In *Soul and Body*, there are three instances of *þē[c]* and one with *mē[c]*, in which *c* is partially or completely erased following the dative forms of the pronouns. Likewise, in *John the Baptist's Prayer*, the choice to erase each letter *c* contained at the end of the dative pronouns also seems to have occurred after the poems were completed. The letters directly following the erasures have a space between them and there are no instances where text is written on top of any of the erased area, thus indicating that the letter was erased at a stage later than when the text was originally copied.

30b–31a telle / þæt ūsic] Cramer (1897), p. 163, and Assmann (1898), p. 176, suggest *talige þætte ūs*. Mackie (1934), p. 174, proposes *telle* as opposed to *talige* in line 30b, followed by *þæt ūsic*. Holthausen (1935), p. 10, queries whether *witod[lice]* might be appropriate for the half-line line 30b. The off-line only contains one stressed syllable, so *lice* would offer another stressed syllable and give line 30b two stressed syllables, as opposed to the one that it contains (owing to the lacuna). The surviving portions of letters still evident on the outer edges of the manuscript make Holthausen's reading for line 30b unlikely. Holthausen also suggests *þæt to dæge ūsic* for line 31a. *ASPR* III, p. 357, argues that because lines 94, 96 and 126 contain the complete form of the pronoun *ūsic* with the *ic* erased in each case, it is likely that the same is true for line 31a. This is indicated in the established text by means of the blank spaces

in between *ūs* and the closing parenthesis. Additionally, because the descending stroke at least three spaces before the word *to* in line 31a is visible, the assumption of *ūsic* as the original reading is reinforced. *ASPR* further suggests that *þæt ūs* or *þte ūs* would fill the rest of the gap, and this reading is supported by Muir (2000), p. 679. Four spaces preceding the word *to* there is a long descender visible at the bottom of the hole; thus, it is likely that the surviving piece belonged to the *s* in *ūsic*. Because 'reckon' or 'account' are fitting translated words in terms of context with the rest of the line, *telle* and *talige* are both suitable possibilities for line 30b and would fit on the manuscript. Likewise, either *þte ūsic* or *þæt ūsic* in line 31a is suitable, and since a descender in *ūsic* is still present on the manuscript, the full word *þætte* would not allow enough room for *ūsic* on the manuscript. This edition includes *telle* because it is suitable in terms of context; there is evidence in the surrounding area of the lacuna to support the reading and the word fits metrically. Scansion of the line below ('/'marks stress and 'x' marks lack of stress) shows the metrical stress of line 30 and the suitability of *telle*:

/ x x x / x x / x / x
Wēne ic ful swīþe ond wītod *telle*

32 sylfa gesēcan] Grein (1857), p. 192, restores the line as such, as do most subsequent editors since it strongly corresponds with the evidence of the manuscript.

36 rēafian] The verb translates as 'to seize', 'rob', 'plunder'. This adds to the animation of the scene as Christ, the warrior, breaks into Hell and takes possession of what rightfully belongs to God.

39b The anacrusis in line 39b lends Christ's descent a sense of haste as the Harrowing described in line 40 is brief and hurried. The use of anacrusis in this example hastens readers through the description of the Descent and supports the claim that the poem is not about the Descent.

42b Wræccan þrungon] See Appendix 3, line 42b.

43 hwylc] Muir (2000), p. 679, first noted that the manuscript originally read *wylc*, with the *h* wedged in at a later point; cf. *Judgement Day I* (line 95b) *gewylc*, and *Soul and Body II* (line 20a) *won* (for *hwon*). Anderson (1986) argues that perhaps the addition indicates the 'unaspirated pronunciation of the word' (213, n. 43).

46 Line 46 is the only verse that lacks alliteration, but the end-rhyme in *Esāias* and *Sacharias* offers a replacement to alliteration. Bredehoft notes that 'rhyme can be shown to be a functional part of Old English verse technique' (2005), p. 147, so it comes as no surprise that the poet employs end-rhyme to account for the absence of alliteration in one of the lines. Apart from line 46, there is no internal or end-rhyme in the poem as is more common in late Old English poems such as *Judgement Day II*, a poem composed much later than *John the Baptist's Prayer*. See Caie (2000), pp. 9 and 51.

50 Iohannis] Holthausen (1937), p. 200, adopts *Iohannis* in line 50a as the alliterating word with *geseah* and *sigebearn* and alters line 50b to *godes āgen bearn*. This alteration is amiss; however, Mackie (1934), p.174, Muir (2000), p. 343, and *ASPR* III, pp. 220, 357,

are correct to present the line as it appears on the manuscript. *ASPR* adds further support for maintaining the manuscript reading by highlighting a similarity in alliteration in line 23b. According to Anderson (1986), p. 637, the name *Iohannis* strongly suggests that John is the first to receive Christ in Hell and not Adam. This theory seems more plausible than the assumption that Adam is the first to meet Christ in Hell, since textual evidence points to John. See Commentary on lines 56 and 135.

sigebearn] Muir (2000), p. 343, documents *sigebeorn*, but the manuscript shows no evidence that the combined vowels in *bearn* are *-eo-* . The cusp of the letter *e* and *a* are identical to other words on the folio that contain *-ea-* together. Additionally, the arc in the letter *a* is a flat horizontal line, as it is in many other instances where *-ea* are present in the manuscript. When preceded by a letter *e*, the final vertical stroke in the letter *a* contains a serif, whereas the letter *o* remains sans serif. In instances in the folia where *-eo-* is present (for example lines 42, 45, 48, 71, 73, etc.) the arc is curved and the bowl is distinctly rounded.

53 hǣdre] Used adverbially, from the noun *hādor*. The word 'brightly' refers to the gates of Hell and their personified emotions which parallel the collective sentiment of the Patriarchs. As the Hell-dwellers eagerly anticipated Christ's return, so too were inanimate objects, such as the doors, personified and their anticipation expressed through their physical state. The claim that the doors shone brightly serves to intensify the severity and subsequent longing that overwhelmed every aspect of Hell. In this instance, the doors went beyond just shining as they reflected Christ's light; they radiated brightly in anticipation of Christ's coming. Like the earth that shook (*John the Baptist's Prayer*, line 20) and the water that stood still (lines 100, 104), the doors here are expressing their experience.

55 sē] Possibly owing to a portion of the descender in the *s* being lost in the hole preceding *sē*, Holthausen (1835), p. 10, omits s*ē*, although enough of the stem and descender of the letter is visible to ascertain that it is indeed an *s*.

56 burgwarena ord] The poem opens with a narrator who occasionally interjects commentary throughout the piece in order to move the action along. It is also clear that John the Baptist speaks in line 23 whilst awaiting freedom from Hell. However, at line 56, some scholars have noted that the speaker, who is summoned as chief amongst the fortress's inhabitants to speak to his kinsman, must be Adam. In the *ASPR* III introduction, Dobbie (1936), p. 62, proposes an interpretation harking back to Holthausen's theory (1908), pp. 49–53, suggesting that Adam delivers the speech from lines 59–137 (speaking for two thirds of the poem). Although John is described immediately before the speech, Dobbie suggests that *burgwarena ord* must refer to Adam, since Adam is the founder of the race. Greenfield (1965), p. 141, believes it is either John or Adam. Kaske (1976), pp. 47–9, claims that the speaker from lines 56 ff. is John, naturally making him the *burgwarena ord*. Conner (1980), pp. 183–4, contends that John is the principle speaker and *burgwarena ord*, basing the argument on thematic grounds, while Trask (1971), p. 421, claims that John is the speaker here, although there is a gradual shift from his voice to the poet's as the poem progresses. Similarly, Hill (1972), pp. 382–9, concludes that although

John is presented as the *burgwerena ord*, the poet speaks as representative of the Christian community after line 76. Anderson (1986), p. 637 and n. 9, on the other hand, maintains the same reading for *burgwarena ord* as with *mæges* in line 25, stating that the semantic duplicity of *ord* could point to either Adam as the 'first', man in the scriptural sense or a 'front or point man' of a battle-formation, in the Germanic sense. Anderson concludes that the voice of *burgwarena ord* is distinct from Adam's, John's and the poet's and is present for riddling purposes. I would argue that since John was the last Old Testament figure to enter Hell without divinely authorized baptism, he would be nearest the gates of Hell when Christ entered. Therefore, he would be the *ord* to meet Christ at the gates of Hell. Since *Iohannis* is named in line 50 there is a strong implication that the herald, *burgwarena ord* and only other speaker apart from the narrator in the text is John. See Commentary for lines 50 and 135. See also Ch. 3, pp. 80–1.

60 ūs [ic sār]ige] Trautmann (cited by Cramer who accepts his translation, 1897, p. 163) and Holthausen (1899), p. 356, reconstruct the line as: *ūs* [*sorgcear*]*ig*. However, as is noted in *ASPR*, little room is available for a word of that size to fit within the lacuna, especially since, as in line 31, the manuscript most likely contained *ūs ic*, with the *ic* erased. Mackie (1934), p. 176, restores the line as: *ūs* [*þus sār*]*ige*. However, Holthausen (1908), p. 52, later establishes a reading which closely matches the manuscript evidence. This reading, which includes *ūs* [*ic sārige*], is supported by Muir (2000), p. 679, and retained in this edition.

61 bīdan [sceoldon]] Cramer (1897), p. 164, emends *bīdan* to *bīdon* [*þæs longe*], as does Holthausen (1899), p. 357, to agree with line 80b. However, Holthausen (1935), p. 10, later proposes *bīdan* [*sceoldon*], which both *ASPR* III, p. 357, and Muir (2000), p. 679, support. This restoration seems more plausible as it provides a more suitable attempt to avoid unnecessary alteration of the text when evidence on the folio does not necessitate emendation. The latter reading is a fitting reconstruction in terms of the spaces available in the gap and in terms of context with the line.

62 monigne] Grein (1857), p. 193, and Assmann (1898), p. 177, emend *monige* to *monigne* and add *Hell* after *monigne*, despite there being neither loss nor space available to the manuscript at this point. They further modify *brōþorlēasne* to *hrōþorlēasne*, while Sievers (1885), p. 515, criticizes Grein's emendation, basing his argument on metrical grounds (*brōþorlēasne* would unsuitably give the half-line four stressed syllables). Following the alliterative pattern of the line, Cramer (1897), p.172, retains the manuscript reading, as does Mackie (1934), p. 176, who only amends *monige* to *monigne*. Holthausen (1899), p. 357, also amends *monige* to *monigne* and assumes there is a loss to the b-verse. He reassembles the lines to read *þonne monigne . . . . . / . . . . . bindeð brōþorlēasne*. Holthausen (1907), p. 201, elsewhere makes the emendation *mon gebindeð* in lieu of the manuscript *monig bindeð*. Muir (2000), p. 679, maintains that too many problems in lines 62–63a exist to merit a plausible reconstruction; however, he supports the translation suggested by Bradley (1982), which includes: 'although the traitorous Devil – he is an enemy abroad – ensnares many a brotherless exile, that man is not bound so closely beneath oppressive locks nor so cruelly beneath painful fetters' (p. 393).

Chambers, Förster and Flower (1933), p. 73, claim that the word following *wræccan* shows fragments of descenders in what appears to be the first, fourth and fifth letters, something I confirmed myself upon viewing the manuscript in Exeter. The *DOE* fails to offer any evidence of similar passages in Old English poetry, so there is no indication that this was part of a familiar oral formula. Shippey (1976), p. 141, suggests *wonspedgan* to follow *wræccan*. However, this reading fails metrically because the three syllables stressed in *wonspedgan* would give line 60a a four-syllable stressed reading of the half-line once *wræccan* was also accounted for. Although small fragments of descenders are evident, not enough evidence exists to suggest a word with any certainty. Brantley (1999), p. 48, comments that since the passage is damaged and the Devil's name can only be suggested, the chance absence of his name is actually quite fitting and offers a playful sense to the passage. These lines are notoriously difficult; however, what seems to be at the heart of the passage is that the Devil has the ability to ensnare the lost, yet if they keep courage and trust in God they can be saved. With manuscript damage following line 62, compounded with metrical reading difficulties, it is indeed precarious to reconstruct verses 62–63a. If *monigne* is an adjective from *manig* that modifies the noun *brōþorlēasne*, then it would be reasonable to give *monige* the same inflective *-ne* ending as the noun it qualifies.

62–8 These lines offer insight into the limitations of the Devil as opposed to the freedom of a saved soul. Though the Devil is *wīde fāh*, the pronoun *hē* cited in line 64 refers to the lost soul who is not so bound by restrictions and can be freed if he trusts in Christ.

63 Collectively, Grein (1857), p. 193, Assmann (1898), p. 177, and Cramer (1897), p. 164, add *wergan* after *wræccan*; however, as *ASPR* III appropriately indicates, 'more letters are lost from the manuscript than can be accounted for by this reading' (p. 357). Muir's agreement (2000), pp. 343, 680, with *ASPR* is reasonable, since the space available leaves a large enough gap to contain more letters. Upon examination of the original manuscript itself and also a high resolution scan of the folio, I am convinced that the bottom portion of what is likely to be the third letter is not the letter *r*. If the word following *wræccan* was *wergan*, the *r* would be categorically inconsistent with all of the other letter *r*'s in that passage. Certainly, no single *r* is an exact replica of the other, yet in this case having the descender of the *r* so low and with the stroke itself being so thick, it would not just be an irregular *r*, by comparison with other *r*'s and other letters with descenders, such as the letter *w*, *s* or *þ*; its form would completely conflict with the scribe's hand not only on fol. 120*v*, but also on the remaining folios that contain the poem as well.

64 hē] See Commentary to lines 62–8.

64b nīðlocan to] Although *ASPR* III, pp. 357–8, contends that at least two letters following *loc-* are visible, the letters *-an* are suggested with caution. Following *nīðlocan*, there is enough space for a small word, although, as *ASPR* argues, 'this line may have been left shorter than the others' (p. 357). If a small word is missing from the line, it would certainly be part of line 65a. *ASPR* suggests *oððe* to follow *nīðlocan*, a proposal which is supported by Muir (2000), pp. 343, 680, who argues

that Mackie's (1934), p. 176, recommendation of the word *to* instead of *oððe* would be inadequate to fill the line on the manuscript. Grein (1857), p. 193, and others who keep to Thorpe's edition (1842) offer no suggestion to complete the line. If *oððe* completed the line, it would most likely be squeezed in rather awkwardly. The word *to* seems a more plausible reconstruction in terms of spacing and layout of the words; however, the line may very well have been shorter than the others if nothing was supplied or perhaps longer if indeed *oððe* completed the line.

68a Grein (1857), p. 193, Cramer (1897), p. 164, Assmann (1898), p. 177, Mackie (1934), p. 176, and most subsequent editors supply *hē* after *þæt*. However, as *ASPR* III, pp. 221, 358, quite rightly explains, the line as it stands is an example of an unexpressed pronoun subject. The same unexpressed pronoun subject *hē* is evident elsewhere in the Exeter Book; cf. *Christ*, line 602. Muir (2000), pp. 343, 680, follows *ASPR*'s argument, citing that this is a case of an unexpressed pronoun subject. For further discussion on unexpressed pronoun subjects see A. Pogatscher (1901), 'Unausgedrucketes Subject im Altenglischen', *Anglia* 23, 261–301.

69 ān gelȳfað] Grein (1912–14), p. 22, reads this as two words, explaining *ān* as an uninflected dative. *ASPR*, p. 221, follows this reading, drawing attention to a similar case in *Genesis A*, line 643. Muir (2000), p. 343, agrees with *ān gelȳfað*, and highlights Bradley's translation (1982), p. 393: 'thus we all trust in you alone, my precious Lord', as a fitting interpretation. Other editors like Cramer (1897), p. 172, and Mackie (1934), p. 176, have *āngelȳfað*, while Cosijn (1898), p. 127, recommends *āre gelȳfað*. However, *ān gelȳfað* seems reasonable as it stands and provides a sensible reading in context with the line without needed emendation.

69–78 In reference to John's armour, Crotty (1939), pp. 354–5, notes that the legend underlying these lines appears in another Anglo-Saxon text, *Blickling Homily VII* on the Birth of John the Baptist. Further to this, Crotty identifies the actual source for the incident as it occurs in a fourth-century Syrian homily. For a translation and commentary on the Syrian homily see Mingana (1927). Crotty further links the legend of John, in childhood, receiving weaponry as gifts from Gabriel, to another fourth-century Syrian homily. For a discussion and translation of these two homilies see Mingana (1927), nos. 22 and 183, pp. 342–9 and 438–61. Anderson (1986), p. 637, makes a similar claim regarding the reference to armour, whilst also contending that Gabriel's connection to both the armour and John is symbolic. The poet may have been familiar with some version of the legend of John the Baptist receiving armour, although nothing else in the poem connects them with the possible sources. The lines in the poem go beyond the literal sense, revealing a typological layer of meaning. Since John is associated with Christ's initial receipt of the Holy Spirit, here too, we see Christ returning the gift of the Holy Spirit to John so as to remain with the saint in Hell until Christ's Harrowing. Thus, John's receipt of the armour is representative of the gift of the Holy Spirit which protects and supports him whilst he awaits rescue. See also Ch. 3, pp. 77–80, n. 86, and Appendix 2, lines 72–3.

71 end] A neologism. For further discussion on *end* see Ch. 1, p. 26.

74 cyneþrymma wyn] Kock (1918), p. 52, argues that because this refers to Christ who is being addressed, *cyneþrymma* is not the verb's object, rather it corresponds with *þū*. See also Commentary on line 22.

76 Ēalā] This interjection is a commonly used invocation to begin antiphons in homilies and liturgical texts. The four antiphonal-like passages within the poem emerge half-way through the text transitioning the focus away from Hell to the themes of baptism and salvation. See also lines 84, 99 and 103 for other instances of *Ēalā*.

80 þæs] As the inflected form of the demonstrative *sē*, *þæs* operates here as the adverb 'so'.

83 hȳrde] As is addressed in *ASPR* III, p. 358, *hȳrde* is in the subjunctive where an indicative would usually be expected; cf. *Order of the World* (lines 7 and 89), *Guthlac A* (line 55), *Riddle* 70 (lines 5, 16 and 26).

87 dorum] For manuscript *doru*. As first noted by Grein (1857), then Cramer (1897), p. 178, and later reiterated by *ASPR* III, p. 221, and Muir (2000), p. 344, the word must be the dative form *doru*. Kirkland (1885), p. 40, claims that *helledorum* is a compound word, but analyses the words *helle* and *dorum* separately. In doing so, he fails to demonstrate that *helledorum* functions as a compound. Muir (2000), p. 344, suggests that the macron sign may be left off. *Dorum* and the two words preceding it (*under helle*) are written over an erasure. Taken as the dative plural, it is likely that *dorum* would operate with the preceding genitive singular noun *helle*. See Ch. 1, pp. 20–1, 26.

90–3 Very little can be done to restore these lines without taking great liberties with the text. Grein (1857), p. 194, originally suggested *[in þam dimman hām] dryhten god* to fill the gap in line 92 and proposed *mǣndon* to begin line 91a. Although there is little, if any, evidence to verify Grein's claim in line 92, his proposal of *mǣndon* in line 91a is employed by Muir (2000), p. 344, and Bradley (1982), who translates the lines as 'we, penitent and mourning, lamented for our race' (p. 394). I agree that the conjectural reading of *mǣndon* is suitable as it agrees with the alliteration, context and physical space on the manuscript, although it should be more accurately translated as 'we, repentant, mourned, lamenting our race'. This reconstructed line can be understood as John's statement on how the saints were sorrowful for their sins, and that this further lamentation was not simply for the Hell-dwellers who died before Heaven was established, but also for all of humanity living without Christ's salvation and grace. *ASPR* III, p. 358, offers the only other readings of the lines, suggesting with certainty that *hrēowen-* of line 90b should conclude with *-de*. *ASPR* further contends that the word following *oþþæt* is *þū*, based on manuscript evidence. A verb-form parallel to *bimengdes*[*t*] is suggested to work in connection with this verb in line 93a; hence the reading *oþþæt* [*þū ūs sōhtest*] has previously been suggested as a suitable reading. If this is the case, *ūs* would most likely have *ic* erased after it (see line 31a), although even if squeezed in, there is insufficient room within the lacuna to fit in such a conjectural reading. Even without *ic*, the word *ūs* would not allow for the word *sōhtest* to appropriately

fit in with the line. After thorough examination of the general spacing of the words and letters on the folio (which reveals that the scribe's spacing was rather uniform), and considering that the scribe may have run the two words together (as he does elsewhere), this too, does not justify the inclusion of the words *ūs ic*. It should also be noted that the top portions of two ascenders follow the word *oþþæt*. The first of the ascenders is recognized as *þū* and the presence of a second ascender, which is approximately two tot hree spaces after the letter *þ* of the word *þū*, rules out the possibility that the word *us* or words *us* (with *ic* erased) were part of the line. Shippey reconstructs the line as *oþþæt* [*þū on siþe*], which is plausible, although I contend that the line may be more accurately read as *oþþæt* [*þū sōhtest s*]*ige* . . . with the possibility of an alternative verb that suits the line. The latter reconstruction more closely follows the general sense, context and alliteration of the line. There seems to be little that can be done with line 93a apart from restoring the *-t* at the end of *bimengdes*. Shippey adds *moldgrundas* after *bimengdest*, which would alliterate with the subsequent clause in line 93b (*mōdigast ealra cyninga*). This conjecture is not sound metrically, as it would give the half-line a total of four stressed syllables, and it might also require *moldgrundas* to be squeezed in rather awkwardly within the lacuna (see Fig. 12). With such a large area of damage and no supporting evidence in the manuscript, it is risky to make conjectures.

Fig. 11. *bimengdes-* and *-gast* as it survives on fol. 121r.
Fig. 12. Shippey hypothesis with *moldgrundas*.
Fig. 13. *bimengdest* and *mōdigast* reconstructed. Palaeographical evidence is insufficient to make a definitive conclusion as to what word belongs in the space.

93 bimengdes[t]] A hapax legomenon. For further discussion on *bimengdes*[*t*] see Ch. 1. p. 26.

93 mōdi]gast] Grein initially contended that the word in question was *eadi-gast*, although *ASPR* III suggests *m* as the alliterating letter in line 93b. Since *-gust* only appears in Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, as a compound, it is most likely that 'the only appropriate word' (p. 358) suitable to accommodate the alliteration in line 93b would be [*mōdi*]*gust* or [*mōd*]*gust*. Despite this closer

examination of the word by looking at the reverse side of the folio it seems that the letter in *g?st* is an *a* and not a *u*, so the word *mōdgast* or *mōdigast* would be just as fitting in terms of context and alliteration. Half-lines similar to line 93b of the poem are found at line 36b and line 118b in *ASPR*, although closer examination of the actual half-lines in the manuscript gives no indication of what the vowel in line 93b might be, because the words in comparison to *g?st* contain the letter *u* and the letter *a* respectively. Alternative compound words found in the *DOE* that end in *-gast* begin with *ærend-*, *cear-*, *ellen-*, *ellor-*, *geosceaft- heah-*, *wuldor*, *froror-* and *þegnung-*. None of the alternative compound words fits in terms of alliteration. One other instance of the word *modgast* is found in *Widsith* (line 14). Muir's edition (2000), p. 344, does modify *mōdgust* to *mōdgast*, but no explanation for the change is offered.

93a–95a Although little can be made of half-line 93a with certainty and nothing can be made of what follows in line 94a, both lines may be connected in terms of context and comprehension of the difficult antiphon that they are contained within. After expressing praise for Mary's role in giving the Christ-child to humanity, the Hell-dwellers anxiously anticipated the time that He would descend to save them. The passage can be understood as John explaining how Christ searched and found the saints in Hell, whilst acknowledging His first Advent in infancy and perhaps making reference to His Harrowing as the Second Coming with respect to those waiting in Hell. See Commentary on line 93.

94 ūs] See Commentary on line 29.

95 mōd] This refers to the spiritual as opposed to the bodily part of a man. As a special quality in the soul, it can be understood in a positive sense as 'courage' or' high spirit', and in a negative sense, 'pride' and 'arrogance'. In this instance, *mōd* takes a negative connotation, since John describes how the Hell-dwellers, collectively, *beswīcan* (deceived) themselves by their own *gīfre* ('covetous', 'greedy') *mōd*.

96 ūs] See Commentary on line 29.

99–106 Reiterated by Muir (2000), p. 680, *ASPR* III suggests that 'the interpretation of these lines is very difficult' (p. 358). The main problem appears with the presence of the negative particle in line 102a and *nales* in line 106a, which was, until recently, deemed contradictory to the passage's general sense. However, examinations by Trask (1971), p. 432, Hill (1972), Kaske (1976), p. 59, Shippey (1976), pp. 42, 141–2, Connor (1980), p. 186, Anderson (1986), p. 637 n. 7, Izydorczyk (1990) and Hieatt (1990), p. 433, all emphasize the relationship of the poem to the paschal vigil liturgy. In doing so, each investigation has aided in our understanding of the passage, whilst also identifying previously undetected liturgical influences. While Trask contends that the passage embodies the climactic metaphor of the poem, Hill contends that the stasis that the world underwent (according to the tradition of the *Protoevangelium*) at the moment of Christ's Birth is connected to and directly relevant for line 100, line 104. Shippey argues that the symmetrical patterns of lines 98–102 and 103–6 offer a glimpse into the mind of the poet. He further

contends that *nales* should be emended to *mōstes*, as first proposed by Grein (1857) and maintained by Mackie (1934). Conner reads the passage as two of the four liturgical apostrophes while using the standard method of emendations by Trask, Hill and Kaske. Anderson and Izydorczyk assert that the antiphonal apostrophes are liturgical echoes rooted in a tradition based on a reversed sequence of the events more commonly used in later literature and art; while Hieatt refers to *Vercelli Homily XVI* and a series of charms to further explore the idea of cosmic stasis in the lines as previously discussed by Hill. Muir (2000) translates these lines accordingly: 'O Jerusalem in Judea, how quietly you dwell in that place. All the living beings dwelling on earth who sing your praises are not allowed to pass through you. O Jordan in Judea, how quietly you dwell in that place. In no way (can) you flow over (all) those dwelling on earth yet they are allowed to enjoy your waters joyfully' (p. 681). Hall's informative article explores the difficult passage in light of typological connections between baptism and the *descensus* in the Christian tradition and offers a range of meanings and interpretations for the vexing passage. See Hall (2008). In earlier critiques of the passage, Grein (1857), p. 194, suggests omitting *ne*, which is accepted by Cramer (1897), p. 173. Grein suggests *mōstes* after *geondflōwan*, although this does not fit metrically because it would add an extra syllable to the line. Cosijn (1898), p. 127, suggests altering *Nales* to *Naldes* (=*Noldes*) and *ne mōstan* in line 105a. Grein further offers *mōstes þu geondflōwan* as an alternative reading for line 104a, which is also adopted by Cramer (p. 167) and Mackie (1934), p. 178. Anderson (1983), pp. 218–19, emends to *nales* [*mōstan*] *þ[ē] geondflōwan*, which reads: 'Earth's citizens [could] not at all stream through [you]'. Muir (2000) suggests that 'reading or understanding *meaht* / *miht* rather than *mōstes* in line 105a avoids the infelicitous repetition of the auxiliary and supports recent critical understanding of the passage' (681). The lines are more straightforward than previous critical assessment may suggest. The verbs (line 101 *geondfēran* and line 105 *geondflōwan*) used to describe Jerusalem and the Jordan indicate that John's liturgical invocation refers not only to those in Hell but to a collective people on earth. The negative particles in lines 101 and 105 reinforce the inaccessibility of the two symbolic locations again to those in Hell, and further still, that the privilege of walking in Jerusalem and wading in the waters of the Jordan is not available to all humanity. The concluding lines and invitation to partake in baptism at the end of the poem suggest that, through baptism, all can symbolically enjoy the Jordan, whilst newfound salvation brought through the sacrament will allow access to the New Jerusalem, that is Heaven.

101, **107** þē] See Commentary on line 29.

108 gedyrstum] The *DOE* claims that the word is doubtful, and *ASPR* III, p. 359, further argues that the word *gedyrst* is not found anywhere else. In terms of sentence sense, it cannot be connected with *dyrstig* or *dedyrstig* meaning 'bold', 'rash', and Holthausen (1908), p. 53, further contends that it is an error for either *gedȳstum*, the dative plural of the noun *gedyste*, or perhaps a derivative of *dust*. A further suggestion is *gedyftum*, a derivative of *deorf*, meaning 'labour', 'effort', 'hardship' or 'tribulation'. *ASPR* also proposes *dyrfan* 'to injure'. Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, state that *gedyrstum* derives from the noun *gedyrst*,

which is translated 'tribulation'. Muir (2000), p. 681, uses Bradley's (1982) translation, 'Now, deep in tribulations, I entreat you, our Redeemer' (p. 395). This translation seems most suitable in terms of context. Other words that contain *-st-* within the same proximity in the manuscript (*oflyste*, line 81, *brēostum*, line 97, *mōstan*, line 101) are written in a similar manner as in *gedyrstum*, and the word is quite possibly a genitive plural form of *gedyrst*, so there is little to suggest that the scribe spelled *gedyftum* incorrectly by missing the staff of the letter *f* in the word.

117–136a Garde (1991), pp. 128–9, treats this passage as a dialogue between John and David with the former speaking at lines 117–17, 120, 123–6, 130–1, and the latter at lines 119, 121–2, 127–9, 132–6. Apart from the narrator, there is really no indication that there is any other speaker in the poem other than John. See Commentary on line 135.

118 þē] See Commentary on line 29.

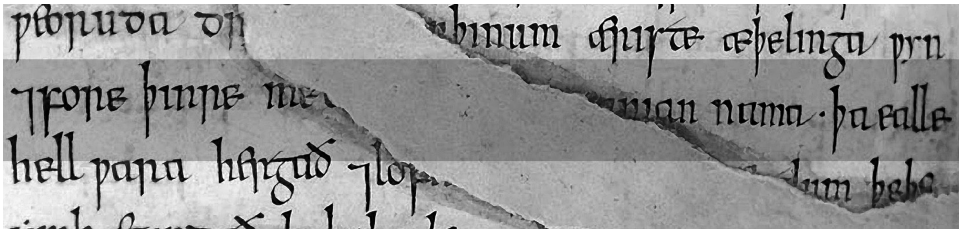
118–27 While alternative readings of scholars are offered when available, the restorations in the subsequent lines are based on the rhetorical pattern of the verses, context, evidence of oral formulae (when available) and on the evidence of the manuscript. Unless otherwise noted, most editors emend in a similar manner.

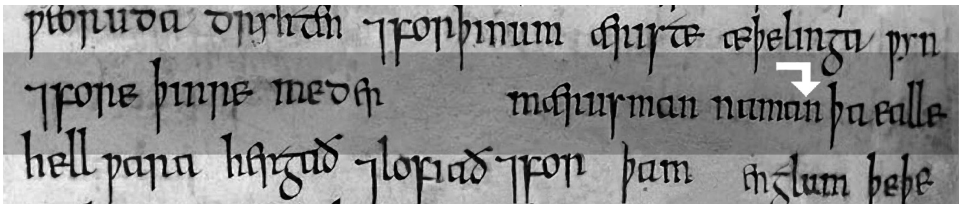
119a īnum] manuscript evidence and the context of the poem necessitate the restoration to [*þ*]*īnum*.

120b–121a dry[hten ond for]] Grein (1857) and later editors restore the lines based on manuscript evidence and a pattern of *ond fore* preceding and following the lines. At line 120, the letter immediately preceding *þīnum* is an *r* and not an *e* or an *n*, so *for* is most probably to be restored here.

122 þīnre mē[der . . . Ma]rian] Holthausen (1907), p. 201, first proposed restoring *þīnre mē[der mar]ian* and alternatively (1908), p. 53, *þīnre mē[der / mærsu]man*. Further to this, he suggests that the syntax demands the form *naman* here (see Fig. 14). *ASPR* III, p. 359, quite rightly points out the fragmentary letter following *me-* contains evidence of a curved stroke or bow found in letters like *c*, *o* and *d*, therefore *mē*[*der*] is a very plausible reconstruction. Not only on account of surviving manuscript evidence but also because the word 'mother' suitably fits within the context of the line, I believe that *mēder* is conceivably the first word to fill the gap, and there is enough evidence to suggest that *Marian* is the word at the right side of the lacuna. However, neither of these proposed modifications completely accounts for the entire gap in the manuscript; *see* Figs. 14–16. As Holthausen (1908), p. 53, points out, there was probably a word containing five or six letters in between *mē*[*der*] and [*M*]*arian*. Possible inclusions to complete the lacuna might be *þære bið* or *þære is*, but there is not enough proof to support such conjectures. Although it may be rather futile to try to reconstruct the missing word or words they may very well hold the key to the interpretation of *nama*.

nama] Muir (2000), p. 386, contends that, if there were other data to suggest a northern origin of the text, then *nama* might be taken as demonstrating loss of the final *n*. It is possible that the manuscript form *nama* may alternatively be understood as a parallel form of *naman*. See Ch. 1, pp. 00–0, and reconstructions in Figs. 14–16.





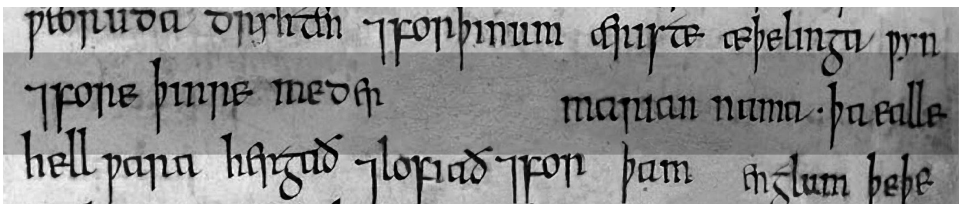


Fig. 14. Excerpt from surviving manuscript.
Fig. 15. F. Holthausen's modification with *me*[*der mærsum*]*an nama*[*n*].
Fig. 16. My reconstruction and modifications: *me*[*der mar*]*ian nama*.

123–4 This line has been restored by Grein (1857), p. 195, Assmann (1898), p. 180, and Cramer (1897), p. 170. The restoration to *lof*[*iað*] is certain, as all editions suggest. The insertion of *ond for* is based on context and the pattern in lines 119–24. As *ASPR* III, p. 222, identifies the letter *e* three spaces before *-lum*, it cautiously claims that fragments of the letters preceding the syllable *-lum* 'make it reasonably certain that the word to which *-lum* belonged was *englum* [and that] Cramer's restoration . . . is probably correct' (1897), p. 359. Still, no editors have gone so far as to claim with complete certainty that the syllable is conclusively *eng-*; however, upon close examination of the reverse side of the page, not only is the *e* evident, but the top of the *n* and much of its two shafts are clearly visible as well. Furthermore, although a portion of the top of the *g* is visible without looking at the reverse side of fol. 121*r*, more of the vertical stroke at the top of the *g* is visible when looking at the word from the reverse page. Thus it is more than just speculation that the prefix is *eng-*, since the three letters are visible on the manuscript, and it is certain that the complete word on fol. 121*v* is *englum*.

124 þē] See Commentary on line 29.

125 þā] Cramer (1897) emends to *þe*, which is adopted by Muir (2000) because it quite rightly fits the gap and makes sense contextually.

126 ūs] See Commentary on line 29.

128 for] *For* is supplied following line 131a, and also in Cramer (1897), p. 170. Grein (1857), p. 195, Assmann (1898), p. 180, and Mackie (1934), p. 180, suggest *fore*.

129 swā þēah] For manuscript *swaþean*. All editors emend as such, apart from Mackie (1934), p. 180, who suggests *swāþēan*[*a*].

132 wit unc] Momma (1997), p. 99, points out that there are oblique cases of detached unstressed personal pronouns which are most often arranged in accordance with their cases alone. Thus, *wit unc* is unstressed and precedes the nominative case.

135 git] The mysterious wording *git Johannis* suggests to some critics that John could not possibly be the speaker so it must be Adam speaking, unless, for some reason, John was speaking in the third person about himself. Early editors, except for Cramer, understood *git* as a second person dual pronoun. Grein (1857), referencing Grimm's *Grammatik* IV, pp. 294–5, translates *git Johannis* as 'ihr beide, du und Johannes'. Mackie (1934), p. 181, omits *Johannis* altogether by rendering the phrase 'thou and I'. In the introduction of *ASPR* III, p. lxii, Dobbie (1936) argues that the phrase *git Johannis* translated literally reveals that John is not the speaker, and that *burgwarena ord* (line 56) refers to Adam. Cramer (1897), p. 174, offers the adverb *gīt* in lieu of the dual pronoun *git*, yet the line, which would read 'as John still does in the Jordan', is not free from obscurity. Although the line could be understood as John still having the ability to inspire the world, the poem already has him placed in Hell, so he cannot still be offering inspiration from the Jordan. Crotty (1939), pp. 357–8, offers further emendation by proposing *gio* and supports the claim by suggesting that scribal error might have confused *o* and *t*, since the letters have a similar shape in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, especially at the end of a word. Although the translation seems most eloquent, making assumptions that there are scribal errors when no strong evidence exists and suggesting word changes to suit particular readings seems most hazardous. In agreement with previous discussion of the phrase by Holthausen (1908), who calls it 'nicht zeitlich zu fassen' (p. 52), Trask (1971), pp. 422 and 434, refutes earlier claims by the likes of Crotty and Cramer as unconvincing and suggests that the dual pronoun *git* is fundamental to the general sense of the closing statement. Most recent scholars, such as Shippey (1976), p. 41, Anderson (1986), p. 638, and Conner (1980), p. 191, agree that *git* is a dual pronoun referring to an unnamed pleader, following a liturgical pattern. Although previous discussion over whether or not the phrase should be adjusted to suit a specific reading provides valuable commentary, arguments for a change of letter or meaning in the word *git* are unpersuasive. Nothing in the manuscript suggests that the word was written in error and despite the somewhat baffling placement of *git iohannis*, there is a sensible method of clarifying the linguistic and thematic confusion in the text. Looking at the text within the liturgical framework in which it was written allows for a clearer understanding of the poem's unity and provides insight into the number of speakers in the poem. The final lines read: 'Just as You and John beautifully inspired / this entire world by Your baptism / in the Jordan, for this, may thanks be to God for ever!' This final crux concerning the number of speakers in the poem is more easily solved if one understands these

three lines as a concluding statement by the narrator who opens the poem and likewise keeps with the invocative quality that develops throughout the text by closing with a small prayer of praise and thanksgiving. See also Commentary for line 50 and line 56.

137 sīe þæs symle meotude þonc] See Appendix 3, line 137b.

Appendix 1

The Doctrine of the *Descensus* according to Post-Apostolic and Medieval Commentators from the First Century to the End of the Eleventh Century

The main focus of this chart is to highlight the widespread and traditional belief in Christ's Descent and how this popular idea was referred to and discussed by patristic commentators over the first millennium. The chart outlines discussion relating to the *descensus* doctrine in a variety of ways, as some commentators referred to it in passing, some writers created hymns and prayers outlining its details with imaginative fervour, and yet others took more didactic approaches in analysing specific aspects of the doctrine. I have not documented the records of discussion and debate about the nature of Hell or who resided there, although many commentators do specify which souls were present in Hell during the *descensus* and Harrowing. For discussion of the topic of souls residing in Hell, especially relating to John the Baptist's presence there, see Sheerin (1976). For discussion on the doctrine of the afterlife in relation to Christian thought and history see W. Rounseville (1878), *The Destiny of the Soul. A Critical History of the Doctrine of the Future Life* (New York: W. J. Widdleton); and also Finch (1940), pp. 129–259.

Since this chart should serve as a guide outlining the popularity and prevalent belief in the *descensus* throughout the first millennium, it documents the location of the original source information found in *PL* or *PG* and provides a summary of source content as each work relates to the *descensus*. To allow readers to analyse the evolution of the *descensus* and review how its details evolved, content relating to the *descensus* is listed in chronological order according to approximately when respective writings were produced. The chart also indicates the Christian literary period in which each author was writing, and specifies whether the works were branded heretical (H) or whether written within the Western/Latin (WT) or Eastern/Greek (ET) traditions.

This chart serves to demonstrate that, despite the doctrine's sparse biblical basis, there was huge appeal and a categorical belief in it by prominent figures dominating Christian thought and theology. Since specific aspects of the doctrine evolved and either gained approval or were branded heretical, the summary section of the chart highlights which aspects of the *descensus* were most popular and/or troubling. Although many apocryphal texts such as the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Gospel of Thomas* discuss the Descent in detail, the apocryphal texts did not have widespread acceptance

over the entire millennium, so to avoid complicating the chart, the apocryphal texts have been excluded.

Similarly, I have also not included details by various authors concerning the different Creeds, as that is a different and sizeable topic in itself; *see* Ch. 1 for further information about the Creeds.

As details of the *descensus* evolved, Christ's activity in Hell became a complex matter of discussion. Therefore, the final column in the chart indicates Christ's activity as it relates to the three soteriological themes of Christ's activity in the Underworld described by A. Grillmeier (1965), *Christ in the Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon*, trans. J. S. Bowden (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co.), p. 87; and (1949) 'Der Gottessohn im Totenreich: soteriologische und christologische Motivierung der Descensuslehre in der älteren christlichen Überlieferung', *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 71, 4–5. In his analyses of the *descensus* doctrine and what Christian commentators believed had occurred when Christ descended, Grillmeier identifies three main purposes of the Descent. The three soteriological themes include the *Predigtmotiv*, in which Christ descended to preach in the Underworld, the *Taufmotiv*, which describes Christ's intent to administer baptism and offer salvation and the *Kampfmotiv*, which encapsulates Christ's victory over Hell and the liberation of the righteous.

Abbreviations
AN: Ante-Nicene; **PN**: Post-Nicene; **WT**: Western Tradition; **ET**: Eastern Tradition; **H**: Heretical

Christ's activity
Predigtmotiv (preaching theme);
Taufmotiv (administration of baptism);
Kampfmotiv (Christ's subjugation of Hell and the liberation of the just)

Ignatius of Antioch, *c.* 35 x 50 – 98 x 117. AN

Epist. ad Mag., cap. 9, col. 669–70; *PG* 5. Kampfmotiv
Ignatius suggests that the Prophets waited in the Underworld for Christ to descend and raise them from the dead.

Epist. ad Trall., cap. 9, col. 682; *PG* 5. Kampfmotiv
In his quote of Matt. 27: 52, Ignatius describes how Christ descended into Hell and rescued the multitude.

Epist. ad Phil., cap. 5 and 9, col. 699–700 and 703–6; *PG* 5. Kampfmotiv
Although the actual Descent is not mentioned, Ignatius testifies to the rescue and release of the Old Testament saints and Prophets by Christ.

Polycarp, 69–*c.* 155/6. AN

Epist. ad Phil., col. 1005–6; *PG* 5. X
In a letter to the Philippians, Polycarp cites St Peter's sermon from Acts 2: 24, and implies the Descent.

Marcion the Gnostic, *c.* 85–*c.* 160. AN

In Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*, I. 27. 3; *PG* 7. Kampfmotiv
Marcion's commentary survives indirectly through his Christian opponent, Irenaeus. Marcion accepts the Descent doctrine, but argues that the righteous Old Testament figures were not saved from Hell.

Justin Martyr, *c.* 103–*c.* 165. AN

Dial. cum Tryph. Jud., cap. 72, col. 643–6; *PG* 6. Predigtmotiv
Justin quotes an apocryphon, arguing that the Jews removed a section within the Book of Jeremiah referring to Christ's Descent. In this passage, Justin references Isa. 26: 19 and claims that Christ descended to preach the message of salvation to the Hell-dwellers.

Dial. cum Tryph. Jud., cap. 99, col. 707–10; *PG* 6. X
Justin further affirms that Christ descended, whilst suggesting that the Jews who killed Him believed He was mortal and would remain in Hell.

Apol. prima pro Chris., cap. 46, col. 398–9; *PG* 6. Kampfmotiv
Justin takes a universalist approach to the Descent by suggesting that all the righteous before Christ were saved through Him.

Apol. II pro Chris., cap. 13, col. 466–7; *PG* 6. Kampfmotiv
This passage further asserts the notion that all the righteous before Christ were saved through Him. Here the Descent is implied, although it may be argued that this is a reference to I Pet. 3: 18.

Hermas, d. *c.* mid-2nd cent. AN

Past. III, Sim. IX, 16; *PG* 2. Kampfmotiv / Predigtmotiv
Hermas proposed that the apostles/teachers who died subsequently carried on Christ's ministry in the Underworld until He rescued the souls in Hell.

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, *c.* 120/130–202. AN

Adv. haer., I.27. 3; *PG* 7; see Marcion the Gnostic above. Kampfmotiv

Adv. haer., III.2. 2; *PG* 7. Predigtmotiv

Irenaeus suggests that Christ ministered to those in Hell, just as He did on earth.

Adv. haer., IV.27.2; *PG* 7. PREDIGTMOTIV
Irenaeus enforces the Catholic doctrine that Christ's Descent also included preaching to and saving the righteous from Hell.

Adv. haer., IV.22.1; *PG* 7. PREDIGTMOTIV/TAUFMOTIV
The passage further contends that part of the mission of the Descent was to offer salvation to the righteous in Hell.

Adv. haer., IV.20.4; *PG* 7. PREDIGTMOTIV / KAMPFMOTIV
This and the above reference are allegorical interpretations of episodes in Christ's life which Ireneaus suggests are symbolic of the Descent. These passages further suggest that Christ's purpose was to become man in order to save humanity and minister in Hell.

Adv. haer., IV.33.12; *PG* 7. PREDIGTMOTIV / KAMPFMOTIV

Adv. haer., IV. 31.2; *PG* 7. X
This passage states that Christ was in the lower parts of the earth for three days.

Adv. haer., V.31.1–2; *PG* 7. PREDIGTMOTIV
Combining Eph. 4: 9 and Luke 15: 4, Irenaeus notes that Christ descended to seek the lost sheep. Irenaeus further argues that the lower region that Christ descended to was not earth; rather Hell was a distinct and separate location from earth.

Clement of Alexandria, *c.* 150–*c.* 215. AN

Strom., VI.6; *PG* 8. PREDIGTMOTIV
Clement explains that when Christ descended, His purpose was to preach either to both Jews and gentiles or only to the Hebrews in Hell. Essentially, Christ's mission was to save. The groundwork for universalism is established, by which all those in Hell could be saved when Christ descended.

Strom., II.9; ibid. TAUFMOTIV
The Descent is discussed in relation to the apocryphal *Shepherd of Hermas*. In this chapter, Clement makes the connection between baptism and the Descent. He argues that those who died before Christ descended in death, but ascended with life through Christ's Descent.

Adum. in priorem D. Petri epist. PG 9. PREDIGTMOTIV
In his adumbrations on I Pet. 3: 18 and 4: 6, Clement indicates that Christ continued His preaching ministry in Hell.

Tertullian, *c.* 160–*c.* 225. AN

De anima, cap. 55.2; *PL* 2. KAMPFMOTIV
In describing the Descent, Tertullian leads Latin Christianity into the first of a series of successive steps culminating in the dogma of Purgatory. Here, he describes how the Patriarchs and Prophets were saved.

De anima, cap. 7.2; *PL* 2. KAMPFMOTIV
In discussing the nature of the soul and also which souls waited in Hell for judgement, Tertullian concludes that the souls that waited were those of the Patriarchs.

Adv. Marc. IV, cap. 34. col. 474–5; *PL* 2. X
Tertullian designates an intermediate state where Christ made the Patriarchs, Prophets and Gentiles partakers of Himself.

Origen, *c.* 185–*c.* 254. AN

Contra Celsum, II.43; *PG* 11. PREDIGTMOTIV
Origen defends the doctrine of Christ's Descent and discusses His ministry in Hell.

Contra Celsum, II.56; *PG* 11. X
In this passage, Origen argues that Christ's public death was historical, not a myth, consequently validating the Descent.

In lib. Reg. hom. II, col. 1023, 1026; *PG* 12. PREDIGTMOTIV / TAUFMOTIV
Commenting on I Sam., Origen argues that the Patriarchs and Prophets must have preceded Christ in Hell. Origen further develops the idea of universalism, leaving the possibility that some rejected Christ's message in Hell.

In Num. hom. XVIII, col. 717 ff. *PG* 12. X
Origen's allegorical interpretation of Num. 6: 6 and 9: 13 suggests that when the body died, the souls of those before Christ descended to Hell.

Hom. in prim. lib. Reg. 18: 3–25; PG 12. PREDIGTMOTIV / TAUFMOTIV
Origen argues that every place needs Christ and in the same manner, those places require preparation for His coming. Thus, John the Baptist is introduced as the forerunner of Christ in Hell, who readies everyone for Christ's Descent.

Com. in evang. Matt. 16: 10; *PG* 13. KAMPFMOTIV
The commentary provides a reference to the Descent as a means of defeating death and freeing the OT saints.

Hom. in Luc., IV. Col. 1811–12; *PG* 13. PREDIGTMOTIV / TAUFMOTIV
Near the end of the homily, Origen refers to John the Baptist as the forerunner to Christ who preached to those in Hell.

Com. in evang. Joannis, Tomus II.26; *PG* 14. Predigtmotiv
Origen describes John's purpose as two-fold. John is Christ's forerunner from birth, in life and in death; thus John is Christ's forerunner in Hell.

Com. in epist. ad Rom., V.10.10; *PG* 14. Predigtmotiv
A comparison is made between Christ's Descent to that of Jonah's three days in the sea creature.

Com. in epist. ad Rom., V.10.11–12; *PG* 14. Kampfmotiv
Origen provides an analogy suggesting that like a noble king waging war on an enemy and taking back what is rightfully his, Christ despoiled Hell and defeated Satan.

Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus, end of 2nd/early 3rd cent., d. 258. AN

Test. adv. Jud., II.24. *PL* 4. X
Although no direct reference to the Descent is mentioned, Cyprian argues that Christ did not remain in Hell. With reference to his two quotes, Cyprian cites Ps. 29: 3, 15: 10, 3: 6; John 10: 10; Hos. 6: 2; Ex. 19: 10, 11 and Matt. 16: 14.

Hippolytus Romanus, mid-2nd cent., d. 240. AN

Dem. de Christo et Antichristo, par. 26; *PG* 10. Predigtmotiv
Hippolytus argues that Christ's Descent involved Him preaching to the souls in Hell.

De consum. mundi; PG 10. X
The writer (the ascription to Hippolytus being uncertain) argues that the prophecies about Christ were witnessed and fulfilled, including the Descent.

Gregory Thaumaturgus, *c.* 210–60. AN

Hom. IV; col. 1135 *PG* 10. Taufmotiv / Kampfmotiv
Frequent in patristic thought and emphasized here in Gregory's writing is the connection between baptism and the Descent. The entire hymn focuses on John and within it, there is a particular hymnal passage which suggests that just as Christ was baptized, so too would He descend in the flesh into the depths of Hell to save the dead there and defeat death.

Sermo in omn. sanc., col. 1203–6. *PG* 10. Taufmotiv / Kampfmotiv
Gregory reaffirms that the Descent included a salvation message for those in Hell and he outlines what might possibly have been the first formal doctrine relating to atonement.

Julius Firmicus Maternus, writing 1st half of 4th cent. AN

De errore, cap. 24; *PL* 12. KAMPFMOTIV
The entire chapter closely parallels the Descent account in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

Victorinus of Poetovio, d. 303/4. AN

Op. Pars. I. Misc. iii, *Hon. Clem. Fortunati*, col. 131 ff.; *PL* 88. KAMPFMOTIV[1]
This passage suggests that part of Christ's testimony included His becoming man, dying, descending to Hell and defeating death.

Eusebius of Caesarea, 263–339. AN/PN

Historia ecclesiastica, 1.13.19; *PG* 20. KAMPFMOTIV
Eusebius effectively gives the Descent apostolic authority, suggesting that Christ descended and broke the bars of Hell. Christ is also said to have descended alone, but rose with the multitude.

Demo. evang., IV.12.283; *PG* 22. KAMPFMOTIV
Eusebius claims that Christ was sent to the dead that they might be saved.

Demo. evang., X, col. 778 *PG* 22. KAMPFMOTIV
This treatise further emphasizes Christ's Descent, while acknowledging that the souls in Hell were awaiting Him in order to be freed. Matt. 27: 52–3 is cited.

Aphraates the Persian, *c.* 270–*c.* 345. AN / PN

Select Dem., cap. 22.4; NPNF vol. 13, p. 403. KAMPFMOTIV
Aphraates provides an elaborate account of the Descent and harrowing of Hell. This paragraph explains how Christ destroyed the gates of Hell and defeated death. Christ is then said to have completed His ministry in Hell by rescuing the righteous.

Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, d. 328. AN / PN

Epist. on the Arian Heresy, Ep. Iii, p. 6; ANCL, vol. 6, p. 301 KAMPFMOTIV
Alexander explains that while the earth was dark during the Passion, Hell shone with the light of Christ as He descended. Christ is described as descending in spirit to liberate the awaiting souls.

[1] Partially, in that Christ defeats Hell, although there is no mention of liberation of souls

Athanasius of Alexandria, 296–373. PN

In illud, par. 2; *PG* 25. Kampfmotiv
This paragraph states that Christ descended to Hell and rescued the Hell-dwellers. Athanasius uses several scriptural parallels to describe the fulfilment of the Descent.

Con. Apoll., I. col. 1178; *PG* 26. X
For Athanasius, Christ's Descent proved both the complete humanity and complete divinity of His soul.

De synodis, par. 30; *PG* 26. X
Here Athanasius claims that Christ descended to Hell, which itself shuddered when Christ harrowed it.

Epist. ad Epict. par. 5; *PG* 26. X
Athanasius refers to I Pet. 3: 19 and argues that Christ's mission included descending in body and spirit.

In pass. et cruc. Dom., par. 25 ff. *PG* 28. Kampfmotiv
In these specific paragraphs of Athanasius' treatise on Christ's Passion, the effect of Christ's Descent is described. Details include punishment of Satan and the release of the saints.

Ephraem the Syrian, *c.* 306–73. PN

Hymn XXXV, Concerning Our Lord, and Concerning Death and Satan; NPNF, vol. 13, pp. 193–6. Kampfmotiv
Each of the following five hymns describes in lyrical fashion the triumph of Christ over Satan and provides vivid descriptions of the Descent, harrowing and defeat of death.

Hymn XXXVII; ibid., pp. 198–9. Kampfmotiv

Hymn XXXVIII; ibid., pp. 199–200.

Hymn XXXIX; ibid., pp. 200–2.

Hymn LXV; ibid., p. 209.

Hymn XLVIII; ibid., p. 211.
The hymn provides a vivid narrative of Christ's Descent, the conquering of death and rescuing of the saints.

Homily I, On Our Lord, par.1; ibid., p. 305. Kampfmotiv
Ephraem briefly describes Christ's subjection of death in order to defeat it and rescue souls held captive by it.

Hilary of Poitiers, *c.* 300/315–68. PN

Tract. in Ps., LIII. Cols. 346, 572, and 803. *PL* 9. KAMPFMOTIV
Hilary returns to the view of the Descent held by earlier Latin Fathers. In this passage, the claim that the Descent served as a final testimony of Christ's subjection to the law of death is articulated.

De Trinitate, X, par. 65; *PL* 10. PREDIGTMOTIV / KAMPFMOTIV
Hilary cites Eph. 4: 9–10 in his treatise to reaffirm the idea of the reality of Christ's death and Descent as unifying elements in His overall ministry.

Lib. de synodis, par. 27; *PL* 10. X
Here, Hilary claims that Christ's humanity and completeness of His death lie in the reality of His Descent and congregation with the dead. He also notes that Christ would not have told the criminal on the cross that he would be in paradise, if Christ was not about to descend to Hell.

Cyril of Jerusalem, *c.* 315–87. PN

Catech. IV: De decem undec. dogma, par. 11. *PG* 33. KAMPFMOTIV
This passage claims that Christ's Descent was necessary to free those Old Testament figures who deserved rescue.

Catech. XIV: De Christi resurr., par. 18–20. *PG* 33. PREDIGTMOTIV
The entire lecture provides an exaggerated version of the Descent. Paragraphs 18–20 specifically describe the similarities between Jonah in the belly of the sea creature and Christ, who descended to Hell to preach.

Gregory of Nazianzus (Theologus), *c.* 329–389/90. PN

Oratio XLIII, In laudem Basilii Magni, par. 74, col. 598A. *PG* 36. PREDIGTMOTIV / TAUFMOTIV
Gregory describes the life and role of John the Baptist, mentioning, matter-of-factly, John's mission to prepare the souls in the Underworld.

Ambrose of Milan, 339–97. PN

In enarr. Ps., 43; PL 14. KAMPFMOTIV
Here Ambrose argues that although we cannot see Christ corporeally (as Moses did), Moses was witness to his conquering of death followed by the ushering in of the saints into Heaven.

De Isaac et anima, cap. 4.31; *PL* 14. KAMPFMOTIV
Drawing on the allegorical interpretation of Isaac (as a typified Christ) rescuing Rebecca (the soul), Ambrose explores the Old Testament episode as a prefiguration of Christ's Descent.

Expos. in evang. sec. Luc. I, par. 38, 577–8; PL 15. PREDIGTMOTIV
Ambrose describes John as forerunner in birth and in death. Ambrose further suggests that Christ's ministry continued in Hell.

De fide, III.4.27–8; *PL* 16. KAMPFMOTIV
Citing I Pet. 3: 19 and Acts 2: 24, Ambrose claims that Christ, in His humanity, was still free amongst the dead in Hell.

De fide, III.14.112; *PL* 16. X
Ambrose cites Ps. 139: 15 and I Sam. 28 which refers to the place (*Sheol*) where the Prophet Samuel's spirit abides. Samuel's spirit is called up to earth by a witch. This passage by Ambrose suggests a belief that the Old Testament figures were in Hell and argues for an allegorical reading of the Old Testament verse. Further to this, the Psalm is said to be allegorically referring to Christ's Descent into Hell.

De fide, IV.I; *PL* 16. KAMPFMOTIV
The entire chapter describes the Descent, but cols. 3–6 give the most vivid description of the Descent narrative, revealing Christ's conquering of death and rescuing of the saints.

De incarn. Dom. sac., V.40, col. 828; *PL* 16. X
Ambrose reaffirms his previously stated belief in the Descent.

Epist. ad Ephes., col. 386–7. *PL* 17. X
In Eph. 4: 8–9, Ambrose finds the scriptural basis for the Descent and the despoiling of Hell. Although attributed to Ambrose, this commentary is sometimes included in the collection of Ambrosiana. It is, in any case, clear that the commentator believes that scriptural backing for the Descent is found within the epistle to the Ephesians.

Com. in Epist. ad Rom., col. 97; *PL* 17. X
In Ambrose's comments on Romans 5: 15, he refers to I Pet. 4: 6 to further emphasize the notion that Christ descended to Hell.

De myst., cap. 4.6; *PL* 17. KAMPFMOTIV
Christ's Descent is described as being part of His ministry.

Ambrosiaster (Ambrose's authorship unconfirmed), 4th cent. PN

Lib. de instit. Virg., Admonitio, cap. 19.128; *PL* 16. X
This and the following text claim that Christ escaped the corruption of sin and descended into Hell.

De exc. frat. sui Sat., 11; *PL* 16. X

Hymn. (Paschalis) Matt. LXI, v. 11. *PL* 17. Kampfmotiv
The following two hymns emphasize the Descent and Christ's return from Hell on Easter day.

Hymn. Pasch. LX, vs. 5–6; *PL* 17. Kampfmotiv

Epiphanius of Salamis, *c.* 310/320–403. PN

In Sab. Mag., 453B; *PG* 43. Kampfmotiv
John is described as Christ's forerunner, who dwells amongst those imprisoned in Hell, suggesting that Christ would eventually follow John with the Descent.

Tyrannius Rufinus, *c.* 340/345–410. PN

Com. in symb. apos., par. 14. *PL* 21. X
Rufinus states the Descent as fact in light of Paul's teachings.

Ibid., par. 16. Kampfmotiv
Here Christ's power over death is described in detail as He harrows Hell and destroys death.

Ibid., par. 18. X
Here Rufinus explains that the clause 'He descended into Hell' was not in the Creed up until that point, as it had previously implied that 'He was buried'.

Ibid., par. 29. Kampfmotiv
While focusing on Christ's Resurrection, Rufinus briefly discusses Christ's victory over death and despoiling of Hell.

Ibid., par. 30. X
With reference to Ps. 87, Rufinus explains that this must refer to Christ's Descent. Rufinus further contends that although Christ descended as a man, death could not hold Him and He was free amongst the dead.

Ibid., par. 31. Kampfmotiv
In discussing Christ's ascension, Rufinus claims that Christ rescued the souls from captivity in Hell.

Ibid., par. 1. X
Rufinus recalls that other expositors who preceded him discussed the Descent, and he offers his support of the phrase *descendit ad inferna* within the Creed. Although the records of previous expositors that Rufinus refers to have not survived, this shows that the Descent was important enough to warrant attention and discussion.

Ibid., par. 28. X
Rufinus provides a number of Old and New Testament references as evidence of the Descent and offers these scriptures as support of the doctrine's inclusion in the Creed.

Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, 348–*c.* 405/413. PN

Lib. cath., 9.28 ff.; *PL* 59. Kampfmotiv
Prudentius employs poetic license in his use of the Descent. In these passages he blends Christ's miracles into a single narrative leading up to the Crucifixion and His victorious Descent. Christ's victory over death and darkness is also emphasized.

John Chrysostom, *c.* 349–407. PN

Hom. XXXVI in Matt., n. 3, col. 416–17; *PG* 57. Kampfmotiv
Details of the Descent are intricately and thoroughly examined here. John Chrysostom suggests that it is heresy to believe in universal salvation after death, therefore only the Just under the old Law were delivered from Hell. He also suggests that the Gentiles who had not worshipped idols, and neither had hope or knowledge of a saviour were saved.

Theodore of Mopsuestia, 350–428, H (writing in the PN period)

Com. in NT, In epist. ad Eph., cap. 4: 5–8, col. 918–19; *PG* 66. X
Theodore was an early supporter of interpreting the Descent passage in Ephesians as the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity. Some of Theodore's teachings were eventually condemned (after his death) since, amongst other offences, he contended that Christ was only completely perfect after the Resurrection.

Synesius of Cyrene, *c.* 373–*c.* 414. PN

Hymni IX, col. 1614; *PG* 66. Kampfmotiv
In his hymn, a classical description of the Descent is infused with pagan imagery. Here death and Hell are defeated and the righteous souls are saved.

Jerome, *c.* 347–420 *c.* 347–420. PN

Epist. CXX et CXXI, col. 993; *PL* 22. KAMPFMOTIV
Following up on his theme of the dead being resurrected with Christ after the Descent, Jerome further develops the idea by describing the heavenly city as Jerusalem.

Com. in Dan., cap. 4, col. 511; *PL* 25. KAMPFMOTIV
The commentary includes the suggestion that the angelic figure in the fiery furnace in Daniel was a prototype of Christ in the Descent.

Com. in Osee, III.13: 14; *PL* 25. KAMPFMOTIV
Jerome examines Hos. 13: 14 and interprets the verse as a reference to Christ's conquering of death. Although there is no mention of rescuing the souls in Hell, discussion of the defeat of death dominates this exposition.

Com. in Jonah, cap. I.3.1125b; *PL* 25. KAMPFMOTIV
These three passages use typological references to further emphasize that the captives in Hell were saved and escorted away with Christ to the Holy City.

Com. in Zach., II.9.1008; *PL* 25.

Opera omnia, col. 937; *PL* 25.

Incip. lib. Ps., 103: 17, 54: 16; *PL* 29. X
Commentary within these passages in Psalms provide proof for Jerome that Christ descended to the Underworld.

Incip. evang. sec. Joan., 3: 13; *PL* 29. X
Jerome suggests that this verse in John's Gospel gives evidence of an assumed Descent prior to Christ's Ascent.

Epist. ad Eph., 4: 9–10; *PL* 29. X
Jerome comments that the incarnation and Descent took place at this time.

Oper. Man.: Exp. in ep. ad Eph., cap. 4; *PL* 30. KAMPFMOTIV
Jerome asserts that Christ led captivity captive, essentially capturing the men held captive by the Devil in Hell.

Augustine, 354–430. PN

Epist. Class. III, Epist. CLXIV, col. 711–12; *PL* 33. KAMPFMOTIV
Augustine responds to his friend Evodius' letters concerning the spirits to whom Christ preached in Hell when He descended. Augustine refers to I Pet., and while acknowledging that the biblical passage is difficult, he discusses the factuality and plausibility of the Descent in a philosophical manner. In this

letter Augustine suggests that if those in life did not believe in Christ, then it would be unlikely they would believe in Him and be saved in Hell.

Epist. Class. III.iv–vi, col. 714–18; *PL* 33. PREDIGTMOTIV-LIKE[2]
The biblical passage I Pet. 3: 18–20 is described in a figurative sense, suggesting that the passage does not refer to a time after Christ's incarnation. Augustine contends that the pre-existent Christ came in spirit to preach through Noah to his contemporaries. This view dominated theological readings of the particular biblical passage for centuries.

Sermo CXXX, col. 726; *PL* 38. KAMPFMOTIV
Here Christ's Descent is described as a victory over death and Satan.

Sermo CCXLIV, col. 2195; *PL* 39. KAMPFMOTIV
In his examination of the Creed, Augustine discusses the salvation of the Ancient Just.

Sermo de symb., col. 1189–1202; *PL* 40. KAMPFMOTIV
Augustine argues that Christ descended to free the Ancient Just who were held in Hell for original sin. Going against Clement and Origen, who suggested that salvation and eternal bliss could be enjoyed by those previously not believing in Christ, Augustine argues that only the Ancient Just who believed in a Messiah were liberated.

De haer. LXXIX, *PL* 42. KAMPFMOTIV
The Descent doctrine is further developed here by Augustine. The view of Christ liberating anyone other than those who had foreseen His coming and maintained His precepts by anticipation is branded heretical.

Also, see Pelagius below for letters of Augustine that discuss heretical Pelagian views relating to the Descent.

Pelagius (haeresiarcha), *c.* 354–420/440. H (writing in the PN period)

Epist. Class. III, Epist. CLVIII, CLX, CLXI, CLXIII; *PL* 33. PREDIGTMOTIV
Because Pelagius' views were bordering on the heretical and he was branded a heretic by Pope Zosimus, much of Pelagius' works have not survived and most that have are in the form of quotations within his opponents' writings. Here, Evodius, bishop of Uzalis, writes to Augustine to discuss various matters concerning the soul, salvation and the afterlife. In these particular letters, the troubling 'Pelagian' questions concerning

[2] Since the Descent is referred to figuratively.

the Descent into Hell are discussed and Evodius further enquires about the spirits to whom Christ preached when He descended to Hell.

Epist. Class. III, Epist. CLXVI (De orig. anim. hom.), par. 16–21. *PL* 33. X
Most notably in this discussion about the soul's complex origin, Augustine asks Jerome to clarify why newborn babies contract original sin. Further to this, the Pelagian idea concerning the necessity or lack thereof of baptism for babies is discussed, with further comments on where their souls would end up.

See also Augustine's *Epistola CLXIV* above.

Cyril of Alexandria, *c.* 375–444. PN

Com. in S. Petri ep. 3: 19–20, col. 1014; *PG* 74. Kampfmotiv
Cyril's belief in the Descent resembles that of Origen's, although it is more restrained. There is a hint of universalism within this passage, although it is not fully conveyed. Cyril's main position is that Christ descended to defeat death and take His spoils to Heaven.

Theodoretus of Cyrus, *c.* 393–*c.* 457. PN

Inter. epist. ad Eph. IV:8, *PG* 82. X
Theodoretus refers back to the Psalms and argues that through the giving of gifts as described in Ephesians, Christ is essentially receiving men's faith and in return He gives them gifts of His own. Here, Christ's Descent is interpreted as His death.

Justinian, the emperor, 483–565. ET

Lib. ad Orig., par. 9, col. 990; *PG* 86. Kampfmotiv
Here Justinian vehemently attacks the doctrine of universalism, which might suggest that demons and criminals could be amongst those Christ saved when He harrowed Hell.

Venantius Fortunatus, *c.* 530–*c.* 600/609. WT

Opera, Pars prima, Misc. lib. undec., III.9; *PL* 88. X
Venantius cites apocryphal and pagan sources in his Easter Hymn to describe Christ's Resurrection after His Descent into Hell. Here the Descent is discussed, matter-of-factly, before considering the Resurrection.

Expos. fid. cath.; *PL* 88. X
In this commentary on the Apostles' Creed, Venantius includes 'descendit ad infernum'.

Gregory the Great, 540–604. WT

Mag. moral., XII 9: 13, col. 992; *PL* 75. KAMPFMOTIV
Here Gregory the Great outlines the doctrinal view of the Descent in light of his analysis of Job. Gregory argues that before Christ, every man, regardless of righteousness in life, was held prisoner in Hell when he died. Thus, Christ saved those righteous and took them to Paradise after the Descent.

Epist. I, VII, Ep. 15, ad Georg. Presb., col. 869–70; *PL* 77. KAMPFMOTIV
Gregory writes to George the priest and Theodore the deacon of Constantinople to argue the same view as John Chrysostom, who had earlier suggested that only the righteous could be rescued from Hell.

Oecumenius, writing in the late 6th or early 7th cent. WT

Com. in epist. ad Eph., 4: 9–10; *PG* 118. X
This passage explains, in the same way as Oecumenius' commentary on Gen. 42: 38 and Ps. 27: 1, that these scriptures suggest that Christ did descend into the Underworld. Oecumenius adds that the Nestorians made the heretical assertion that Christ descended as God and ascended as man, whereas Oecumenius argues that Christ descended as man and ascended as God.

Isidore, bishop of Seville, *c.* 560–636. WT

Sent. I, col. 568; *PL* 83. KAMPFMOTIV
Isidore suggests that through Christ's Descent, He sanctioned the road to Heaven.

Ildefonse of Toledo, d. 667. WT

Lib. de cog. bapt., cap. 49, col. 132; *PL* 96. X
Ildefonse argues that Christ's soul descended to Hell whilst His body remained in the grave.

Julian of Toledo, 642–90. WT

Conprob. lib. tres. par. 5.480; *PL* 96. KAMPFMOTIV
Julian describes Christ's Descent as necessary in order to free the Old Testament Patriarchs.

Bede, *c.* 672/3–735. WT

In prim. epist. Petri, III. 19, col. 58 ff.; *PL* 93. PREDIGTMOTIV
In his discussion of the Descent, Bede follows Augustine's

interpretation of I Pet. 3: 19, linking Christ's preaching in Hell to the spirit working during Noah's days.

Historia ecclesiastica, V. 12, 13 and 14; *PL* 95. X
In Bede's account of Dryhthelm, a man from Northumberland who has died, Bede describes the man's journey through Hell and purgatory. Here the Descent is not discussed in detail, but the tradition of purgatory is further strengthened.

John of Damascus, *c.* 676–749. WT / ET

Ex. fide. orth., cap. 29. Col. 1095, 1102; *PG* 94. Predigtmotiv / Kampfmotiv
John reinforces the view held by the Fathers of the early Church that the Descent was a fact and an integral part of Christ's work.

In epist. ad Eph. IV:9, col. 842; *PG* 95. Predigtmotiv / Kampfmotiv
This note reinforces Christ's mission of redemption through the Descent.

Boniface, *c.* 672–754. WT

Op. quae ex om., III, *Rom. synod.*, X, col. 831–3; *PL* 89. Kampfmotiv
Boniface writes to the pope to draw attention to heretical views that claimed that the Descent occurred to save all in Hell, whilst it was already an established doctrine that salvation was only for select souls in Hell.

Cosmas of Maiuma, d. 773/4. ET

Hymni VIII, col. 486; *PG* 98. Predigtmotiv / Kampfmotiv
Cosmas's interpretation of the Descent was to become the accepted doctrine of the Greek Church. This passage describes Christ's Descent to Hell, the preaching of redemption and His rescue of figures like Adam and Eve.

Paulinus II of Aquileia, *c.* 730/740–802. WT

Hymn III. De resurr. Dom., col. 490–2; *PL* 99. Kampfmotiv
In this hymn about the Resurrection it is asserted that Christ saved all the elect.

Paulus Winfridus Diaconus, *c.* 730/740–802. WT

Hom. CXXIV, In die san. Pasc., col. 1328; *PL* 95. Kampfmotiv
Paul argues that Christ was free in Hell and that only the elect were rescued.

Hom. CXXVIII, In fer. ter. Pasc., col. 1330; *PL* 95. Kampfmotiv
Here again, Paul further suggests that only the Old Testament Patriarchs and elect were freed through the Descent.

Alcuin, *c.* 730/740–804. WT

Adv. Elip., II, col. 259; *PL* 101. X
Alcuin shows support for the doctrine of the Descent by quoting Augustine, Jerome and Cassiodorus.

Haymon Halberstatensis, d. 853. WT

Ex. in epist. ad Eph., col. 719; *PL* 117. Kampfmotiv
Haymon explains in his examination of Eph. 4: 9 that Christ saved all the elect during the Descent.

Hom. LXX. In die san. Pasc., col. 452; *PL* 118.

Hom. LXIX. In vig. Pasc., col. 445; *PL* 118. Kampfmotiv
Haymon claims that Christ saved all of the elect, including Adam.

Rabanus Maurus, *c.* 780–856. WT

Com. in lib. Ruth, col. 1213; *PL* 108. X
Rabanus states the Descent in a matter-of-fact way.

Ex. in epist. ad Eph., col. 428; *PL* 112. X
This states that the Descent occurred, but there is no further discussion.

Hincmar, archbishop of Rheims, 806–82. WT

De praed. diss. post., cap. 27, col. 283; *PL* 125. Kampfmotiv
Hincmar quotes Bede to argue that Christ did not descend to preach to the unbelievers, and further argues that only the elect were rescued.

Leo VI, the Philosopher, 866–912. ET

Oratio X, col. 95–110; *PG* 107. Kampfmotiv
The heavy influence of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* is evident in Leo the Philosopher's work. Here the triumph of the Descent is emphasized.

Theophylact of Bulgaria, 1055–1107. ET

Exp. in epist. I. S. Petri 3: 18–19, col. 1231–4; *PG* 123–6. X
While citing Gen. 24: 38 and Ps. 27: 1 as foreshadowing events to the Descent, Theophylact explains that Christ did indeed descend into Hell.

Appendix 2

Scriptural References

1 ff. The theology of the *descensus* has a number of supporting scriptural references, most notably in Eph. 4: 7–11; I Pet. 3: 18 – 4: 6; Acts 2: 30–1; Rom. 10: 6–8. Typological references from the Old and New Testaments include: Gen. 44: 29; Deut. 30: 12–13; Job 18: 17; Ps. 68: 18–19, 16: 10, 24: 7–10, 27: 1, 87: 4, 103: 17, 139: 15; Isa. 26: 19, 42: 7, 45: 2, 53: 8–9; Ecclus. 24: 45; Eze. 26: 20; Hos. 6: 1–2, 13: 14; Zech. 9–11; Matt. 12: 40; John 12: 32; II Cor. 10: 4. Several tropological/allegorical references to Christ's Descent can be found with reference to baptism by fire: Mic. 1: 4, Luke 3: 16; David killing the bear: I Sam. 17: 36–7; Jonah and the large fish: Jonah 1: 17, Matt. 12: 38–41, Luke 11: 29–32; and in the fiery furnace narrative: Dan. 3.

1–2 The first episode of *John the Baptist's Prayer* which involves the women going to Christ's tomb appears to be drawn from accounts of the Resurrection as presented in the Gospels. Because of the connection with the *Vespere autem* antiphon, Matthew's version is considered the accepted source. See Matt. 28: 1–10; Mark 16: 1–3; Luke 24: 1.

13 *hæleð Iūdēa* refers to Joseph of Arimathea. Interestingly, in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, it is Nicodemus who supplies the tomb for Christ's burial. See Luke 23: 50–3; Matt. 27: 57–61; Mark 15: 42–7.

17 Traditionally, there is said to be between one or two angels waiting at the tomb, although the poem indicates that there was a host. See Matt. 28: 2; Mark 16: 5; Luke 24: 4.

20b *folde beofode*, as Muir (2000), p. 682, suggests, is a common image in the Old Testament, and is an exact translation of the Offertory Antiphon for Easter Sunday. The image is also directly connected with Christ's Resurrection as stated in the Gospel of Matthew. See Ps. 18: 7 76: 8, 77: 18, 97: 4; Judg. 5: 4–5; II Sam. 22: 8; Matt. 28: 1.

28 The [*ymb s*]*iex mōnað* period in between John and Christ's birth is alluded to here. See Luke 1: 36, 41; Matt. 3: 2.

23–32 The passage establishes John's role as herald. In fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in Isaiah and Malachi, John's role as forerunner and herald of Christ is stated in the Gospels. See Isa. 40: 3; Mal. 3: 1; Matt. 3: 1–3, 11: 9–10; Luke 2: 26–8; John 1: 6–7. See also Sheerin (1976).

30–3 Rather than Christ declare his presence, as is evidenced in the Gospels, here the words are expressed through John. The allusion to Christ's imminent Coming is still quite clear. See Matt. 12: 40; John 5: 25, 12: 32, 28; Luke 11: 20–1.

33–42 Christ's entrance into Hell has some scriptural backing, although most references are typological in nature, taken from the Old Testament. See Ps. 24: 7–10; Isaiah 45: 2–3; I Cor. 15: 55.

47b–49 Reference to Christ's rescue of the Elect only from Hell, has scriptural backing, according to Garde (1991), p.118. See Hos. 13: 14.

50–5 Emphasis on the image of light shining in Hell's darkness is echoed in several scriptures. See Isa. 9: 2; Hab. 3: 4; 10, Ecclus. 24: 45; Rev. 1: 18.

53–5 As Hill (1972), p. 387, notes, there is a juxtaposition between the Virgin birth and an oblique reference to the Marian image of the *porta clausa*. See Eze. 44: 2.

56–8 *Burgwarena ord* and *mæg* refer to John and Christ, respectively. John, speaking on behalf of humanity, shares a connection with Christ in that he is both the blood relative and forerunner of Christ, his kinsman. See Matt. 11: 11; Luke 7: 28.

59–70a; 80b–82a, 86b–88 and **130–1:** Christ's Coming, firstly to earth, then to Hell, and his imminent Second Coming are a recurring theme in the poem. See Ps. 69: 15 86: 13, 107: 10–16; Isa. 42: 7, 45: 2; Zech. 9: 11; I Pet. 3: 18–20.

72–3 The armour imagery is akin to the spiritual armour of Christ as described by Paul; however, this is preceded by several references to armour that bear typological significance to spiritual protection; see Eph. 6: 10–20; Ps. 3: 3, 18: 34–5, 28: 7, 34: 1–4. This may also be drawn from John's literal dressing; see Mark 1: 5–8; Matt. 3: 4.

76–91 The apostrophal passages to Gabriel and Mary share a connection with regards to the annunciation and nativity. The nativity shares a typological connection with baptism in that the sacrament is a new birth brought about through Christ. Christ's birth in the flesh as described in the nativity story was viewed as a symbol of baptism by patristic commentators and early theologians. His birth and the fluid that would have flowed out during birth epitomized the birth of a new Christian, while Christ's baptism exemplified the purification of the newborn Christian. See Matt. 1: 18–23, 2: 1–12, 3: 16; Luke 1: 26–38, 2: 1–20; John 1: 12–13, 3: 5. For further information on the typological connection between baptism and the nativity see Patton (1994), pp. 84–8. See also van Dijk (2006), pp. 13–42, n. 72.

96–106 Apostrophes to Jerusalem and the Jordan have been interpreted in a number of ways, most notably through the description of cosmic events that occur. The phrase *stōwe stille* in lines 100 and 104 refers to the impact of Christ's life and death on the cosmos. Raw (p. 31) suggests that references to the waters of Jerusalem and the Jordan share a connection with the Red Sea, the crossing of the Jordan led by Joshua and the Babylonian exile. See Josh. 3: 7–8, 13; Ps. 66: 6, Ps. 114: 1, 3, 5, 7–8, 137: 1–4; Jer. 4. Hill (1972), p. 384, argues the cosmic stasis that occurs in Christ's baptism parallels the trembling of the earth that transpires at Christ's death. See Matt. 27: 54.

107–17 Garde (1991), p. 128, points out that this invocation to Christ is reminiscent of God's covenant with Abraham found in Gen. 22: 17. See also Rom. 4: 2–5, 11–13.

117–18 *þū meaht gerīman, . . . sǣs sondgrotu* is reminiscent of declarations of God's infinite wisdom found in Matt. and Luke. In the Gospels, God is said to be able to number the hairs on one's head. See Matt. 10: 30; Luke 12: 7.

107–37 The concluding segment is an invocation of baptism, calling on Christ's mercy which by his death, Descent and Resurrection will provide a new beginning for those who partake in baptism. See Rom. 4: 2–5, 6: 1–4, 10: 8, 11–13; Deut. 30: 12–13; Matt. 3: 15; John 3: 5; Mark 16: 16; Acts 2: 38, 19: 2–6, 22: 16; Gal. 3: 26–7; 2 Cor. 5: 17; Ps. 51: 2; I Pet. 3: 18–22. Allegorical references to baptism include references to: the flood: Gen. 7: 12, 17–24; I Pet. 3: 19–20; Rom. 6: 4; Isaac's circumcision: Gen. 21: 4; Col. 2: 11–12; crossing the Red Sea: I Cor. 10: 1–2; crossing of Jordan: Josh. 3: 15–17; II Cor. 10: 4; the leprosy of Naaman: 2 Kings 5: 27; Matt 8: 17 and in the fiery furnace narrative in Dan. 3.

129–30 Muir (2000), p. 683, observes that the forms of *bīdan* occurring in lines 14b, 61b, 80a, 88a and 129b suggest a longing for Christ's return. This is reminiscent of Ps. 41: 2–3.

134 *Oferwurpe þū mid þȳ wætre* is a direct reference to the concept that Christians must be cleansed and sanctified by 'sprinkling'. See Heb. 10: 22; I Cor. 11: 28; II Cor. 7: 1; Tit. 2: 14.

136 *git Iohannis* refers to the example of the sacrament of baptism 'John and Christ' made in the Jordan. See Mark 1: 9–10.

Appendix 3

Other Sources and Analogues

1 ff. Although the doctrine of the *descensus* arguably lacks any explicit scriptural references, the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the Apostle's and (pseudo-) Athanasian Creeds provide the keys to its development, and no doubt the poet would have been acquainted with some form of the narrative to include it as the backdrop for the overriding theme of baptism. See Appendix I for patristic Commentary on the *descensus*. (Source)

1–16 Conner (1980), pp. 181–3, identifies the liturgical *Vespere autem* antiphon for Holy Saturday, which is repeated before and after the Magnificat, as a likely immediate source. The prologue's repetition of the women's journey recalls a liturgical echo found in the Mass and divine office. (Source)

18–23 The lines are reminiscent of the *Quem quaeritis* trope in the *Regularis Concordia* in which the sorrowful women arrive to an open tomb and are shown the shroud. (Source)

20b Muir (2000), p. 682, states that *folde beofode* is an exact translation of the Offertory Antiphon for Easter Sunday. (Source)

37–9 Crotty (1939), pp. 355–6, contends that the lines allude to an obscure fourth-century Syrian homily denoting a legendary tale involving John's receipt of armour. (Source)

42b Wræccan þrungon] The image of a throng of people (here the righteous Patriarchs and Prophets in Hell) scrambling over one another to see if they can get a glimpse of the approaching Saviour has a close structural parallel in *Christ I*, lines 397–9, where a throng of angels similarly scrambles to see which one can get closest to Christ. (Analogue)

59a The liturgical *Deo gratias* line is represented here. (Source)

59–134 The echoes of baptism in John's speech are reminiscent of the third-century patristic commentator, Gregory Thaumaturgus' *Homilia IV* (See *PG* 10). The homily is set in Hell where John praises the Saviour for descending and defeating death. Further connections between Christ's Descent and baptism are emphasized throughout the homily most specifically at col. 1135. (Source)

69–70a As Muir (2000), p. 683, suggests, there is a credal echo in these lines. (Source)

76–106 The 'O' antiphons are reminiscent of *Blickling Homily VII*. Conner argues that the *Vidi aquam* antiphon an important part of the Easter Sunday procession, is

implied in lines 105–6 and assists in establishing antiphonal references to Jerusalem and the Jordan. Hill (1972), p. 383, identifies the *Protoevangelium*'s reference to the association between Christ's death and the Virgin birth as a possible source for lines 100–6, which draws on the typological parallel between the Harrowing and the Nativity. The phrase *stōwe stille* in lines 101 and 105 can be found in *Vercelli Homily XVI*. (Source, Analogue)

133 Muir (2000), p. 683, indicates that the order of the petitions in the last lines echoes the concluding material of the Litany as found in manuscripts throughout the Middle Ages. For example, see Muir (1988*b*), p. 129. (Source)

137b The liturgical *Deo gratias* response resonates here with the words *sīe þæs symle meotude þonc*. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* the *Deo gratias* is an old liturgical formula of the Latin Church which was said in response to an epistle or prophecy, and also used in extra-liturgical prayers. The poem's final phrase of thanksgiving to God offers further support to the liturgical structure of the poem. For further information on the *Deo gratias*, see the *Catholic Encyclopedia* at www.newadvent.org/cathen/04737a.htm. (Source)

Appendix 4

Transcription and Images of fol. 120*r*

NOTE ON THE RECONSTRUCTED FOLIO

Restoration of damaged texts is nothing new in relation to manuscript studies and the prospects of providing new insights into texts can be facilitated through digital reconstruction or restoration, in particular. Some critics maintain reservations about tampering with a text as it has come down to us, and their concern that reconstruction can manipulate and corrupt readings, interpretations and authorial intent is, quite rightly, valid. However, as S. Larratt Keefer claims, if we

> consider what greater riches we might have uncovered, had we been provided with a copy of the original scribal version from which the Julius scribe himself [for example] did his work . . . it seems right that we should also present, together with our scholarly but subjective views on the text, an absolutely honest replica of all physical evidence from the manuscript witness wherein it is found.[1]

I have attempted in the edition to present the text as it was, whilst keeping in mind that its layout mediates between a structure that adheres to the metrical patterns of the Old English poem whilst also providing a familiar orientation to modern readers of poetry. In the case of these digital reconstructions, though, along with scrutinizing the text and the characteristics of Old English poetry like metre and alliteration, I have further analysed the individual folios, closely examining the lacunae and the surrounding areas of texts where gaps exist and basing critical conjectures on internal manuscript evidence. Certainly, there is no way to ever replicate the exact look of the folios since a number of the lacunae are so large that it would be impossible to reconstruct the damage without speculating in far too risky a manner without enough concrete evidence to support such a restoration. However, it can be useful to view a damaged manuscript in a more complete form by digitally repairing areas around the lacunae where either pieces of letters are still visible or where enough internal evidence supports suggested wording.

Although the task of digital restoration requires close attention to minute details, it bears a resemblance to the traditional method of restoration involving piecing together missing letters and words by placing pencil tracings of letters on paper mounts in areas where lacunae exist. R. Fulk demonstrates this technique in his examination of the *Beowulf* manuscript and successfully

[1] S. Larratt Keefer (1998), 'Respect for the Book', in *New Approaches to Editing Old English Verse*, ed. S. Larratt Keefer and K. O'Brien O'Keeffe. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, p. 44.

retrieves lost readings of the damaged manuscript, whilst also disproving other suggested readings of problematic areas within the manuscript.[2] In a similar way, I have attempted to restore the damaged folios where concrete evidence permits such readings, by piecing the letters together digitally; however, in areas where conjecture is too risky, I have left those lacunae intact.

Rather than taking letters arbitrarily from the text, I have scrutinized the areas surrounding the various lacunae, identifying letters that match the line most accurately and further aligning and scaling the letters to approximate measures that correspond with preceding and subsequent letters of a line that is only partially visible due to a hole.

With the aid of high-resolution images of the manuscript, I have also attempted to match the appearance of the vellum behind specific missing letters as precisely as possible. K. Kiernan notes that 'manuscript pages of vellum rarely lie flat and in extreme cases are severely distorted'.[3] Making the vellum appear to contain natural creases, bends, folds, etc. rather than a flat surface is not simple, because there are no technical programs available to create or manage manuscript manipulation. I have attempted to obtain dimension depth through the use of digital manipulation.

At any rate, there are instances in which digital reconstruction or manipulation is not practical and it serves little purpose to fill in all of the spaces within some lacunae. So, the most sensible conclusion is to admit the uncertainty involved in suggesting specific words as part of the reconstruction of the lacunae is too great. In instances of this nature, I simply make the rendering of the original lacunae smaller, and do not add hypothetical words. However, I cautiously offer what seem to me to be reasonable readings in areas where evidence exists.

I am not suggesting that my reconstructions are exact replicas of the original folios, since the only reference point for comparison is the damaged folios that have survived although attempts to restore digitally the manuscript have helped to confirm or reject some suggested readings. By presenting first the established text with the translation in modern English, then the transcription, the surviving folio followed by the digitized reconstruction, I am providing the reader with a variety of information which will enable the reader to access and interpret the text. By first offering the established text with punctuation and line breaks, followed by the reconstructed folio, my endeavour here is to provide various interpretations of the text within this edition. Presenting the poem in an assortment of ways will facilitate learning and encourage further scholarly discussion on new techniques and approaches that will assist in our understanding of its content.

In the following seven pages I have included a diplomatic transcription followed by an image of fol. 120*r* as it currently appears in the Exeter Book manuscript, which is immediately followed by its reconstructed counterpart. To illustrate the area in which the digital work has been completed, the

2 See R. D. Fulk (2005), 'Some Contested Readings in the *Beowulf* Manuscript', *Review of English Studies* 54.224, 192–223.

3 *The Digital Atheneum* 20.2., Feb. 2000. Restoring Damaged Manuscripts. <http://www.infotoday.com/cilmag/feb00/seales.htm>.

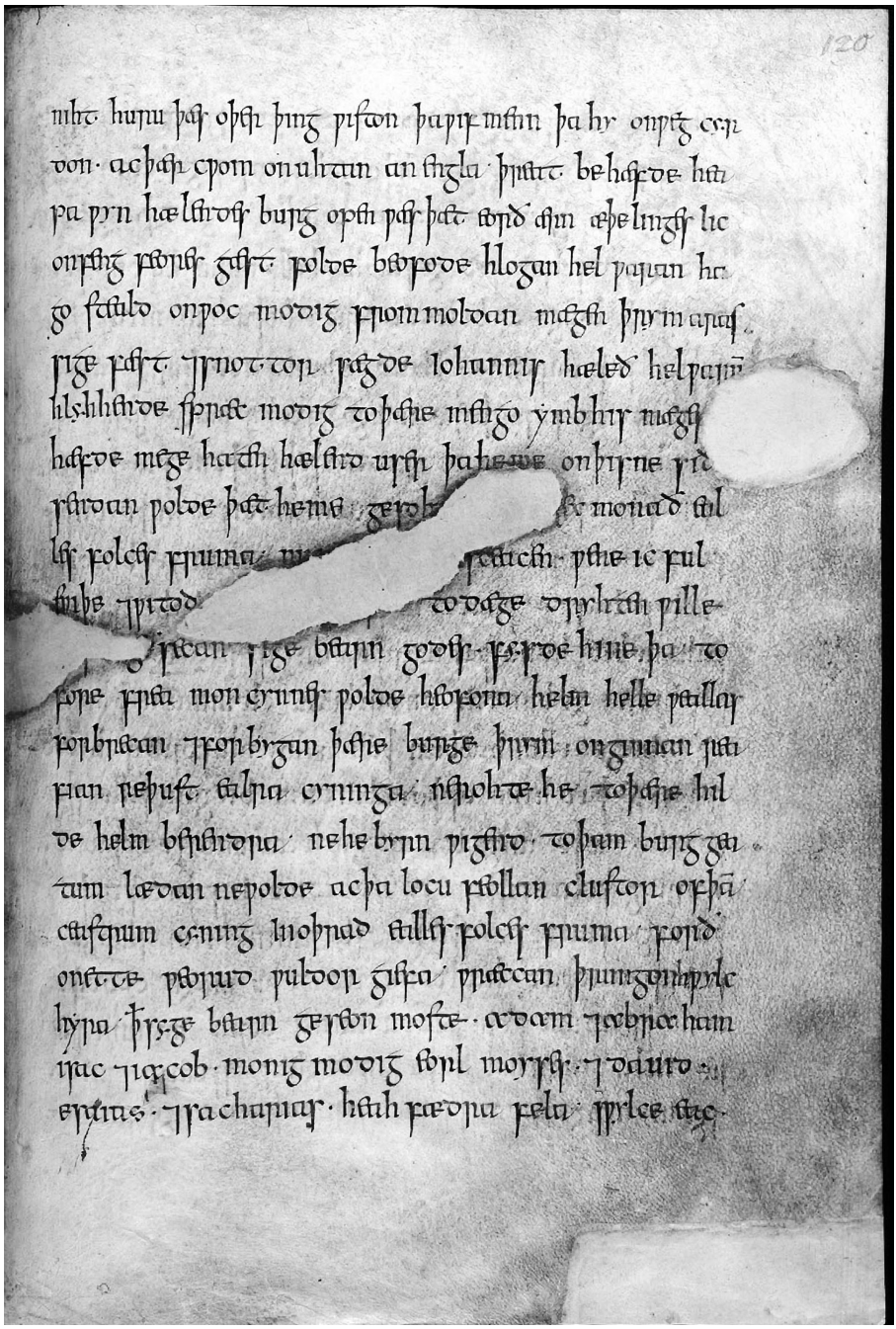
reconstructed area has been darkened in the reconstructed version. Readers should always remain mindful that the reconstructions can never take the place of the original and should be used for comparative purposes with the understanding that reconstructions often present conjectural readings. In places in the transcription where only a fraction of a single letter is present, I have indicated this issue with a question mark.

TRANSCRIPTION

fol. 119b fleot onfaroðe nah ic fela goldes ne huru þæs freondes
þeme ge fylste to þam sið fate nu ic me sylf nemæg fore
minum wom æhtum willan adreogan· wudu mot him
weaxan wyrde bidan tanum lædan icfor tæle nemæg
. ænigne mon cynnes mode gelufian eorl on eþle eala
dryhten min meahtig mund bora þæt ic eom mode
[..]oc bittre abolgen isseo bot æt þe gelong æfter
[...]fe ic on leohte nemæg butan earfoþum ænge þinga fea
sceaft hæle foldan [.....]rf?unian þon̄ icme to frem þum freo
de hæfde cyð þu gec þe[.....]mewæs á cearu symle lufena
to leane swa ic alifde nugiet biþ þæt þonne mon him
sylf nemæg wyrd onwendan þæt he þon wel þolige ··/
ONgunnon him onuhtan æþelcunde
mægð gierwan to geonge wiston gumena gemot æþe
linges lic eorð ærne biþeaht woldan werigu wif wope
bimænan æþelinges deað ane hwile reone bereotan ræst
wæs acolad heard wæs hin sið hæleð wæron modge þe
hy ætþam beorge bliðne fondon cwom seo murnende
maria ondægred heht hy oþre mid eorles dohtor
sohton sarigu tu sige bearn godes ænne inþ eorðærn
þærhi ær wiston þ hine ge hyddan hæleð iudea wendan
þæt he on þam beorge bidan sceolde ana in þære easter

fol. 120 niht huru þæs oþer þing wiston þa wifmenn þa hy on weg cyr
don · ac þær cwom on uhtan an engla þreat behæfde hea
pa wyn hælendes burg open wæs þæt eorð ærn æþelinges lic
onfeng feores gæst folde beofode hlogan hel waran ha
go steald onwoc modig from moldan mægen þrym aras
sige fæst ȝsnottor sægde iohannis hæleð helwarū
hlyhhende spræc modig toþære mengo ỳmbhis mæges
hæfde mege haten hælend user þa he me on þisne sið
sendan wolde þæt heme gesoht [.....] iex monað eal
les folces fruma nui [.....] sceacen wene ic ful
swiþe ȝwitod [.....s.....] to dæge dryhten wille
[..?..] geśecan sige bearn godes · fysde hine þa to
fore frea mon cynnes wolde heofona helm helle weallas
forbrecan ȝforbygan þære burge þrym onginnan rea
fian reþust ealra cyninga nerohte he toþære hil
de helm berendra nehe byrn wigend toþam burg gea
tum lædan newolde acþa locu feollan clustor ofþā
ceastrum cyning Inoþrad ealles folces fruma forð
onette weorud wuldor giefa wræccan þrungonhwylc
hyra þ syge bearn geseon moste · Adam ȝ Abraham
Isac ȝIacob · monig modig eorl Moyses · ȝDauid ·
Esaias · ȝSacharias · heah fædra fela swylce eac·
fol. 120b hæleþa gemot witgena weorod wifmonna þreat fela fæm
nena folces unrim geseah þa iohannis sigebearn godes
mid þy cyne þrymme cuman tohelle ongeat þa geomor
mod godes sylfes sið geseah he helle duru hædre sci
nan þa þe longe ær bi locen wæron beþeahte midþystre
seþegn wæs onwynne · Abead þa bealdlice burg warena
ord modig fore þære mengo ȝ tohis mæge spræc ȝ
þa wilcuman wordum grette · þeþæs þonc sie þeoden
user þ þu us [.....]te secan woldest nuwe on þis
sum bendum bidan [.....]þōn̄ monige bindeð
broþor leasne wræccan [.....?.....] hebið wide
fáh · ne bið heno þæs nearwe under nið lo [.....]
þæs bitre ge bunden under bealu clommum þ he þy
ỳð nemæge ellen habban þōn̄ he his hlafordes hyldo
gelyfeð · þæt hine ofþam bendum bicgan wille swa
we ealle to þe ange lyfað dryhten min se dyra ic
ádreag fela ·siþþan þu end tome Insiþadest þa
þu mege sealdest sweord ȝ byrnan · helm ȝ heoro
sceorp á ic þæt heold nu giet · ȝ þu mege cyðdest
cyne þrymma wyn · þæt þu mund bora minum wæ
re · eala gabrihel huþu eart gleaw ȝ scearp milde
ȝ gemyndig ȝ mon þwære wis onþinum ge witte ·

fol. 121 ⁊on þinum worde snottor þæt þu gecyðdest þa þu þone
cnyht tous brohtest In bethlem bidan weþæs longe se
tan onsorgum sibbe oflyste wynnum ⁊ wenum hwonne
we word godes þurh his sylfes muð secgan hyrde · eala
maria huþuus modigne cyning acendest þa þu þæt
cild tous brohtest In bethlem weþæs beofiende under
helle doru hearde sceoldon bidan in bendum bon
weorces gefeah wæron ure eald find ealle on wynnu[.]
þōñ hyge hyrdon huwe hreowen [.....]on murnende
mægburg usse oþþæt [.....] sige dryhten god
bimengdes [.....]gast ealra cyninga ·
[.....] nu us ic mon modge þe ageaf
from usse geogoðe weþurh gifre mod beswican us
ic sylfe we þa synne forþon berað In urum breostū
to bonan honda sculon eac to ussum feondū freoþo
wilman · eala hierusalem In iudeum hu þu In þære
stowe stille gewunadest nemostan þe geond feran
fold buende ealle lifgende þaþe lof singað · eala ior
dane In iudeum hu þu Inþære stowe stille gewunad
est nales þu geond flowan fold buende mostan hy
þynes wætres wynnum brucan · Nuic þe halsie hælend
user deope In gedyrstum þu eart dryhten crist ·
fol. 121b þæt þu us gemiltsie monna scyppend þu fore monna luf
an þinre modor bosm sylfa gesohtes sige dryhten
god nales fore þinre þearfe þeoda waldend acfor þā
miltsum þeþu mon cynne oft æt ywdest þōñ him wæs
are þearf · þu meaht ẏmb fon eal folca gesetu swylce
þu meaht geriman rice dryhten sæs sondgrotu selast
ealra cyninga · swylce ic þe halsige hælend user fore
[.]inum cild hade cyninga selast · ⁊fore þære wunde
weoruda dry[hten.....]r þinum æriste æþelinga wyn
⁊ fore þinre me?[.....]?nian nama · þa ealle
hell wara hergað ⁊lof?[..... eng]lum þeþe
ẏmb stondað þa þu þe lete sittan [...?..??.?.....]
hond þa þu us on þisne wræc sið weoroda dryhten
þurh þines sylfes geweald secan woldest ⁊hierusalem
In iudeum sceal seo burg nu þa bidan efne swaþean
þeoden leofa þines eft cymes · ⁊for iordane Iniudeū
wit unc inþære burnan baþodan ætgædre ofer wur
pe þu mid þy wætre weoruda dryhten bliþe mode ealle
burg waran swylce git iohannis In Iordane mid þy
full wihte fægre on bryrdon ealne þisne middangeard
sie þæs symle meotude þonc · : ⁊
Wel bið þam eorle þe him on innan hafað reþehyg



Figs. 17. Fol. 120*r* of the Exeter Book (Exeter, Cathedral Library, 3501), surviving text. Image used by permission of B. J. Muir.

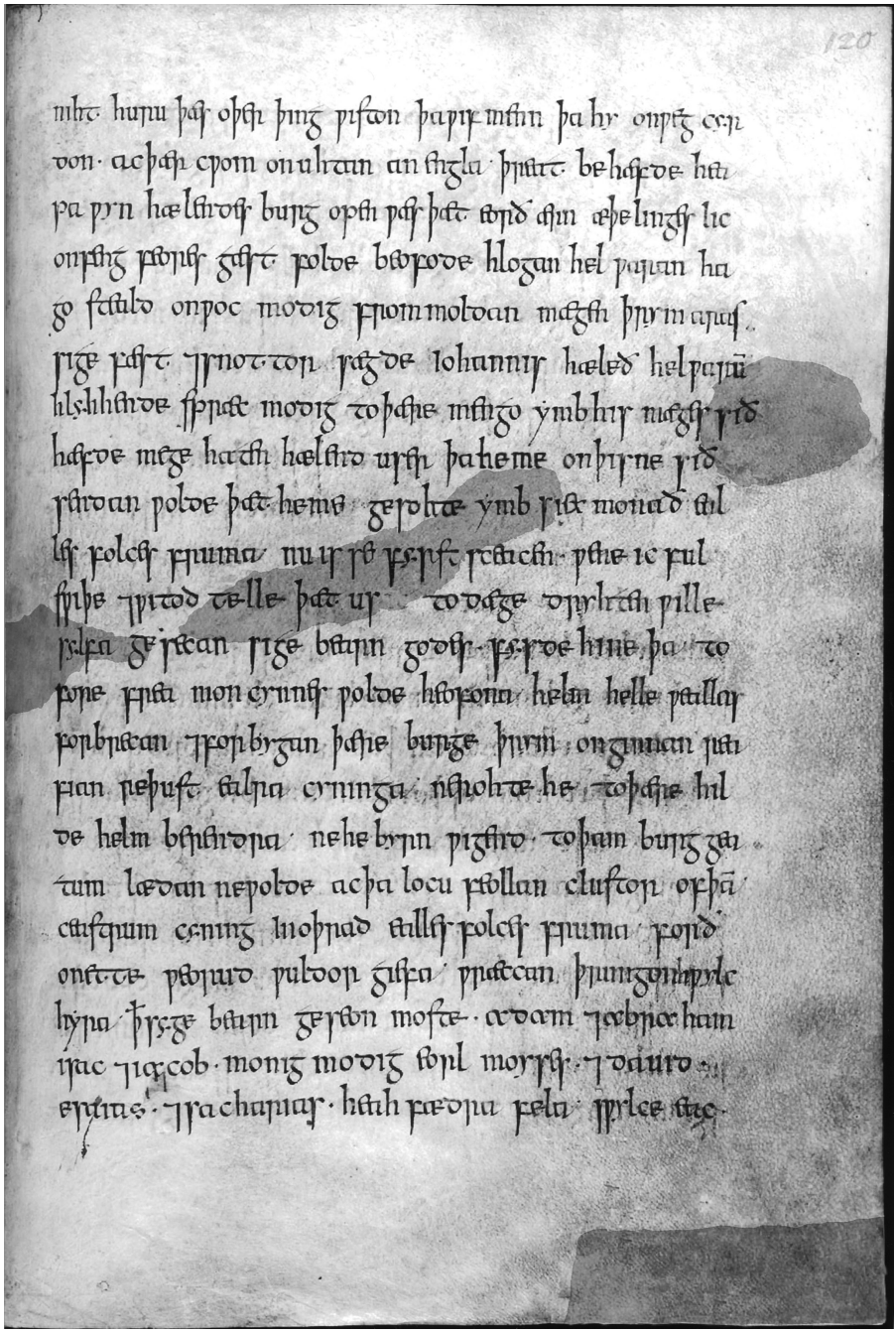


Fig. 18. Fol. 120*r* of the Exeter Book, my reconstruction.

Glossary

Each entry in the glossary consists of four main parts: headword, grammatical category, definition and citation.

1. Headwords are arranged alphabetically. The letters *æ* and *þ* are treated as separate letters after *a* and *t*. The infinitive form of the verb or the nominative form of the noun in the poem is given first, followed by the form as found in the poem. Headwords that contain more than one definition are separated by a semicolon followed by line numbers that indicate which definition is most suitable for a specific line.
2. Nouns are indicated with the abbreviation (N) followed by an abbreviation of the noun's gender (m, f or n). Each noun is marked as either singular (s) or plural (pl) and according to its case (nom, a, gen, dat).
3. Verbs are identified as either weak or strong (wk. v or str v) followed by a designation of the verb class.
4. All adjectival forms in the poem appear under their appropriate headword.
5. Clear abbreviations mark all other grammatical categories.

The glosses provided offer definitions similar to those in my translation but are varied enough to allow readers the ability to translate the poem in their own way. Alternative glosses and near synonyms aim to encourage distinctive translations, while keeping true to the main theme and context of the poem. The spellings of some reconstructed words for lost portions of the text are purely hypothetical. I have referred to Bosworth and Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, for all of the definitions. I also adhere to the changes in scholarly convention; thus, I have also referred to J. R. Clark Hall's *Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Consequently, I have followed his list of headwords for most of this glossary with the exception of the words listed from A to G, in which the *DOE* has been consulted.

ABBREVIATIONS

a accusative
adj. adjective
adv. adverb
anom. anomalous
art. article
comp. comparative
cj. conjunction
d dative
dem. demonstrative
det. determiner
f feminine
g genitive
indef. indefinite
ind. indicative
inf. infinitive
interj. interjection
m masculine
N noun
n neuter
nom. nominative
num. numeral
pf. perfect
p.p. past participle
pl. plural
pers. person(al)
poss. possessive
prn. pronoun
prep. preposition
pres. present tense
pres. p. present participle
pret. preterite
sbj. subjunctive
s. singular
str strong
superl. superlative
v. verb
wk weak
* Not the form that is in the text
** These forms are hypothetical
= Indicates a spelling change in a word, although the meaning of the word is the same as its counterpart following the equal sign.

A

ā *adv.* constantly, always 73
ābēodan *str v. II* speak, announce, declare, summon; **ābēad** *pret. 3 s.* 56
Abraham *pers.* Abraham 44
ac *cj.* for, but 17, 39, 113
ācennan *wk v. I* bring forth, produce, bear, beget, renew; **ācendest** *pret. 2 s.* 85
ācōlian *wk v. II* chill, cool, become cold; **ācōlad** *p.p. 3 s.* 6
Adam *pers.* Adam 44
ādrēogan *str v. II* bear, suffer, endure; **ādrēag** *pres. pf. 1 s.* 70
āgifan *str v. V* restore, give back, give up, leave, return, repay, render, pay, give; **āgeaf** *pret. 3 s.* 95
ān *adj.* one, sole, single, alone; each, everyone, all 17, 69; **āna** *ns* 15; **āne** *as. f* 5; **ænne** *as. m* 12
and(e) = ond *cj.* and 23, 30, 35, 44, 45, 46, 57, 58, 72, 73, 74, 76, 77, 78, 82, 120, [121], 122, 123, [124], 128, 131
ārīsan *str v. I* arise, rise, rise up, rise again, come forth; **ārās** *pret. 3 s.* 22
ār *N f* honour, mercy, grace, pity, favour; honesty; **āre** *gs.* 114

Æ

ænne: *see* **ān**
ær *adv.* previously, before, earlier, some time ago, formerly, already, lately 12, 54
ærist *N n* resurrection, rising up; **æriste** *ds.* 121
æt *prep. +d* at, to before, next, with, in, for against 8
ætgædere *adv.* together; **ætgædre** 132
æþelcund *adj.* noble, of noble kind or origin; **æþelcunde** *pl.* 1
æþeling *N m* prince, ruler, nobleman, one of royal blood; (in poetry) God, Christ; **æþelinga** *gpl.* 121; **æþelinges** *gs.* 3, 5, 19
ætīewan *wk v.* reveal, manifest, show; **ætȳwdest** *pret. 2 s.* 114

B

bana *N m* killer, destroyer, enemy; the Devil; **bona** *ns* 88; **bonan** *gs.* 97
baþian *wk v. II* wash, bath; **baþodan** *pret. 1 pl.* 132
bealdlīce *adv.* boldly, courageously, confidently 56
bealuclam = bealuclomm *N m* painful bond, dire chain, dire fetter; **bealuclommum** *dpl.* 65
behabban *wk v. III* compass, encompass, surround; **behæfde** *pret. 3 s.* 18
belūcan *wk v. II* lock, lock up, enclose, surround; **bilocen** *p.p.* 54
bemænan = bimænan *wk v I (inf.)* bemoan, mourn, wail, lament 4
bemengan *wk v. I* mix, mingle, mingle together, unite, combine, stir up, disturb; join amongst others so as to form one company; confound, plumb; **bimengdes[t]** *pret. 2 s.* 93; *see Commentary*
bend *N m* bond, band; **bendum** *dpl.* 61, 68, 88
beofiende: *see* **bifian**
beofode: *see* **bifian**
bēon *anom. v.* be, become, exist; **bið** *pres. 3 s.* 63, 64; **eart** *pres. 2 s.* 76, 108; **[is]** *pres. 3 s.* is [29]; **sīe** *pres. sbj. s.* 59, 137; **wǣre** *pret. sbj. s.* 75; **wǣron** *pret. 3 pl.* 7, 54, 89; **wæs** *pret. 3 s.* 6, 7, 19, 55, 114
beorg *N m* burial place, burrow, tomb; heap, heap of stones; hill, mountain; **beorge** *ds.* 8, 14
beran *str v. IV* bear, carry, release, deliver, bring, bring forth, offer, bear or carry a sacrifice, bear off, carry out, support, endure, suffer; **berað** *pret. 1 pl.* 97
berēotan *str v. II (inf.)* bewail, bemoan, to deplore a death, mourn, lament 6
beswīcan *str v. I* deceive, betray, delude, entice, seduce, offend, supplant, weaken, evade; **beswīcan** *pret. 1 pl.* 96

Bethlem *place name* Bethlehem 80, 86
beþeccan *wk v. I* encase, cover, conceal, cover over; **beþeahte** *p.p. 3 pl.* 55; **biþeaht** *p.p. 3 s.* 3
bicgan *wk v. I (inf.)* redeem, buy, procure 68
bīdan *str v. I (inf.)* bide, abide, remain, endure, continue, tarry, wait, await, expect, 14, 61, 88, 129; **bidan** *pret. 1 pl.* 80
bifian *wk v. II (originally III)* tremble, quake, be moved; **beofiende** *pres. p.* 86; **beofode** *pret. 3 s.* 20
bilocen: *see* **belūcan**
bimǣnan: *see* **bemǣnan**
bimengdes[t]: *see* **bemengan**
[**ge-**]**bindan** *str v. III* bind, tie, ensnare; **bindeð** *pres. 3 s.* 62; **gebunden** *p.p. 3 s.* 65
bitre *adv.* bitterly, severely, cruelly, sharply 65
bið: *see* **bēon**
biþeaht: *see* **beþeccan**
blīðe *adj.* quiet, calm, peaceful; joyful, glad, merry, cheerful, pleasant; gracious, gentle, kind, friendly 134; **blīðne/blīþne** *as.* 8; *see Commentary*
blīðne/blīþne: *see* **blīðe**
bona: *see* **bana**
bonan: *see* **bana**
bōsm *N m* bosom, womb, lap, breast; *as.* 110
brengan *wk v. I* bring, lead, adduce, produce, bear, carry; **brōhtest** *pret. 2 s.* 80, 86
brēost *N n* heart, mind, thought, the breast as the seat of the vital powers of feelings and affections; **brēostum** *dpl.* 97
brōhtest: *see* **brengan**
brōþorlēas *adj.* brotherless; **brōþorlēasne** *as.* 62
brūcan *str v. II (mainly with g)* use, make use of, enjoy, pass, spend, have enjoyment of, bear, discharge 106
burg: *see* **burh**
burge: *see* **burh**
burggeatum: *see* **burhgeat**
burgwaran: *see* **burhwaru**
burgwarena: *see* **burhwaru**
burh *N f* fortress, city, stronghold; *(figuratively)* tomb; **burg** *as.* 18; *ns* 129; **burge** *gs.* 35
burhgeat *N n* gate, fortress gate; **burggeatum** *dpl.* 38
burh-waru (burg-ware, burh-wara) *N m* (in a collective sense) city inhabitants, citizenry, fortress inhabitants, multitude; **burgwaran** *apl.* 134; **burgwarena** *gpl.* 56
burn (-a, -e) *N f* river, stream, brook, running water; **burnan** *ds.* 132
byrne *N f* a coat of mail, breastplate, corslet; **byrnan** *as.* 72
byrnwīgend *N m* mailed warrior, helmeted warrior, corsleted warrior; **byrnwīgend** *apl.* 38

C

ceaster *N f* city, fort, fortification, castle, town; **ceastrum** *dpl.* 40
cild *N n* child, infant; **cild** *as.* 85
cildhād *N m* childhood, infancy; **cildhāde** *ds.* 119
clūstor *N n* bar, lock, barrier, cell; **clūstor** *nom. pl.* 40
cniht *N m* boy, youth, attendant, servant, knight; **cnyht** *as.* 79
Crist *pers.* Christ 108
cuman *str v. IV* come, go, 51; **cwōm** *pret. 3 s.* 9, 17
cyneþrym *N m* kingly host, royal majesty, royal glories; **cyneþrymma** *gpl.* 74; **cyneþrymme** *ds.* 51
cyning *N m* king, ruler, emperor; a spiritual king; (in poetry) God, Christ 40; *as.* 85; **cyninga** *gpl.* 36, 93, 117, 119

cyrran *wk v. I* go, return; **cyrdon** *pret. 3 pl.* 16
[**ge-**]**cȳðan** *wk v. I* tell, say, utter, proclaim, make known, announce; **gecȳðdest** *pret. 2 s.* 74, 79

D
Dāuid *pers.* David 45
dæg *N m* day; **dæge** *ds.* day 31; *see* **tō-dæge**
dægrēd *N n* dawn, daybreak, early morning 9
dēað *N m* death; **dēað** *as.* 5
dēop *adj. n* deep; profound, awful, solemn; **dēope** *as.* 108
dīere *adj. f* dear, beloved, precious; **dȳra** *m* 70
dohtor *N f* daughter; *as.* 10
dor *N n* door, gate; **doru**[**m**] *dpl.* 87; *see Commentary*; **duru** *apl.* 53
dryhten *N m* a ruler, lord, prince, Lord 31, 70, 108, 116, [120], 126, 133
duru: *see* **dor**
dȳra: *see* **dīere**
[**ge-**]**dyrst** *N f* tribulation; **gedyrstum** *dpl.* 108; *See Commentary*

E
ēac *adv. and prep.* likewise, also, moreover 47, 98
eal: *see* **eall**
ēalā *interj.* Oh! O! Alas! 76, 84, 99, 103
ealdfēond *N m* ancient foe, arch-fiend, old enemy; (*in poetry)* the archenemy, Satan; **ealdfīnd** *nom. pl.* 89
eall *adj. m* all, entire; *as adv.* all, entirely; **eal** *ns* 115; **ealle** *nom. pl.* 69, 89, 102, 123; *apl.* 134; **ealles** *gs.* 29, 41; **ealne** *as.* 137; **ealra** *gpl.* 36, 94, 117
ealle: *see* **eall**
ealles: *see* **eall**
ealne: *see* **eall**
ealra: *see* **eall**
eart: *see* **bēon**
Ēaster-niht *N f* Easter night; Easter-eve *ds.* 15
ēaðe = ȳð *adv.* easily, soon, readily 66
efne *adv.* precisely, just, just now, likewise, alike 129
eftcyme *N m* coming again, return; **eftcymes** *gs.* 130
ellen *N n* strength, courage, power, vigour, valour, fortitude 66
end *adv.* previously, formerly 71; *see Commentary*
engel *N m* angel; **engla** *gpl.* 17; **e**[**n**]**glum** *dpl.* [124]; *see Commentary*
eorl *N m* a nobleman, hero, general, leader, man 45; **eorles** *gs.* 10
eorð-ærn *N n* an earth-house, earth-place, tomb, sepulchre 12, 19; **eorð-ærne** *ds.* 3
Esāias *pers.* Isaiah 46

F
fāh *adj.* guilty, criminal, outlawed, proscribed, inimical, hostile 63
fægere *adv.* beautifully, pleasantly, fairly; **fægre** 136
fæmnena: *see* **fæmne**
fæmne *N f* maiden, woman, damsel, virgin; **fæmnena** *gpl.* 49
feallan *str v. VII* fall, bend down; **fēollan** *pret. 3 pl.* 39
fela *adj.* many, much 47, 49, 70
(ge-)fēon *str v. V* revel, relish, rejoice, be glad, exult; **gefeah** *pret. 3 s.* 88
feollan: *see* **feallan**
fēond *N m* fiend, enemy, foe; the Devil; **fēondum** *dpl.* 98
fēondum: *see* **fēond**

fēores: *see* **feorh**
feorh *N n* life; soul, spirit; **fēores** *gs.* 20
findan *str v. III* find; imagine, devise, order, arrange, contrive, dispose; **fundon** *pret. 3 pl.* 8
folc *N n* folk, people, common people, multitude, tribe; **folca** *gpl.* 115; **folces** *gs.* 29, 41, 49
foldbūend *N m (in pl.)* earth-dwellers, earth's inhabitants, dwellers of the earth; **foldbūende** *nom. pl.* 101, 105
folde *N f* earth 20
for *prep.+ d* for, on account of, by, because of, with 113, [121], [128], 131; **fore** *prep.* before, for 57, 110, 112, 119, 120, 122, [124]
fōr *N f* journey, expedition, way, course; **fōre** *ds.* 33
forbīgan= forbȳgan *wk v. I (inf.)* destroy, to bow down, bend down, abase, humble 35
forbrecan *str v. IV (inf.)* to break, to bend, to break in two, crush, violate 35
forbȳgan: *see* **forbīgan**
fore: *see* **for**; *see also* **fōr**
forð *adv.* forth, out of 41
forþām: *see* **forþǣm**
forþǣm *adv.* for that, for that reason which, because, for; *as cj.* for that, for, because; **forþon** *cj.* 96
forþon: *see* **forþǣm**
frēa *N m* lord, master, the Lord 33
freoþo: *see* **friþu**
friþu *N f* peace, security protection, refuge; **freoþo** *as.* 98
from *prep. + d* from 22, 95
fruma *N m* an originator, author, founder, inventor, a chief, prince, ruler, king 29, 41
full *adv.* full, fully, perfectly, completely; **ful** 30
fullwiht *N n* baptism; **fullwihte** *ds.* 136
fullwihte: *see* **fullwiht**
fundon: *see* **findan**
[**fyrst**] *N m* time, a space of time [29]
fȳsan *wk v. I* hasten, ready; **fȳsde** *pret. 3 s.* 33

G
Gābrihel *pers.* Gabriel 76
-gast: *see* **modigast** 94; *see Commentary*
gǣst *N m* breath; soul, spirit, mind; ghost 20
gebunden: *see* [**ge-**]**bindan**
gecȳðdest: *see* [**ge-**]**cȳþan**
gedyrstum: *see* [**ge-**]**dyrst**
gefeah: *see* [**ge-**]**fēon**
gehāten: *see* [**ge-**]**hātan**
gehȳddan: *see* [**ge-**]**hȳdan**
gehȳrdon: *see* [**ge-**]**hīeran**
gelȳfað: *see* [**ge-**]**lȳfan**
gelȳfeð: *see* [**ge-**]**lȳfan**
gemiltsie: *see* [**ge-**]**miltsian**
gemōt: *see* **mōt**
gemyndig: *see* **myndig**
geoguþ *N f* youth, young, infancy; **geogoðe** *ds.* 95
gēomormōd *adj.* sad of mind, sorrowful; man of sorrowful mind 52
geondfēran *wk v. I* traverse, pass through 101
geondflōwan *str v. VII* flow through 105
geong *N m* a course, journey, passage; **geonge** *ds.* 2
gerīman: *see* [**ge-**]**rīman**

geseah: *see* [**ge-**]**sēon**
gesealdest: *see* [**ge-**]**sellan**
gesēcan: *see* **sēcan**
gesēon: *see* [**ge-**]**sēon**
gesetu: *see* **set**
gesōht: *see* **sēcan**
gesōhtes: *see* **sēcan**
geweald: *see* **weald**
gewitte: *see* **witt**
gewunadest: *see* [**ge-**]**wunian**
gierwan *wk v. (inf.)* prepare, make ready; put on, clothe, adorn 2
gīet *adv.* still, yet 73
gīfre *adj.* greedy, covetous, eager, impatient, overeager, desirous 95
git *dual prn. 2nd pers.* you two 135; *see Commentary*
glēaw *adj.* clear-sighted, skilful, wise, sagacious, prudent, good 76
god *N m* God, the Deity 92, 111; **godes** *gs.* 11, 32, 50, 52, 82
grētan *wk v. I* greet, speak, call upon, hail, welcome, salute; **grētte** *pret. 3 s.* 58
guma *N m* man; **gumena** *gpl.* 2

H
habban *wk v. III* have, hold, acquire 66; **hæfde** *pret. 3 s.* 26
hādre = hǣdre *adv.* brightly, clearly 53
hagosteald *N m* a young servant, young person, young warrior; one without a household 21
hālsian (healsian) *wk v. II* implore, pray, beseech, entreat; **hālsie/hālsige** *pres. 1 s.* 107, 118
hand *N f* hand; side; **hond** *as.* 125; **honda** *apl.* 97
[**ge-**]**hātan** *str v. VII* summon, bid, order, command; **gehāten** *p.p.* 26; **hēht** *pret. 3 s.* 10
hǣdre: *see* **hādre**
hæfde: see **habban**
hǣlend *N m* Saviour, Redeemer, Christ 26, 107, 118; **hǣlendes** *gs.* 18
hæleð *N m* man, warrior, hero 24; *nom. pl.* 7, 13; **hæleþa** *gpl.* 47
hē *pers. prn.* he 14, 27, 28, 37, 38, 53, 63, 64, 66, 67; **hī** *apl. f* they 12; **him** *dpl. f* 1; *ds.n* 114; **hine** *as. m* 13, 33, 68; **his** *gs.m* 25, 57, 67, 83; **hȳ** = **hīe** *apl. f* 8, 90, 106; *nom. pl. f* 16; *as. f* 10; **hyra** = *hira/hiera gpl. m* 43
hēahfæder *N m* patriarch; **hēahfædra** *gpl.* 47
hēaldan *str v. VII* hold, to hold fast, to keep, to grasp; **hēold** *pret. 1 s.* 73
hēap *N m* host, heap, crowd, assembly, troop; **hēapa** *gpl.* 18
heard *adj.* hard, cruel, harsh, severe 7
hearde *adv.* painfully, grievously, firmly, very severely 87
hēht: *see* **hātan**
hell *place name f* Hell, Hades, place of torment; **helle** *gs.f* 34, 87; *ds.f* 51; *gs.f* 53
hellwaran *N pl. m* dwellers of Hell, inhabitants of Hell; **hellwara** *gpl. m* 123; **helwaran** *nom. pl. m* 21; **helwarum** *dpl. m* 24
helm *N m* helmet, Protector; **helm** *as.* 34, 73
helmberend *N m* helmeted warrior; **helmberendra** *gpl.* 37
helwaran: *see* **hellwaran**
helwarum: *see* **hellwaran**
heofon *N m* heaven, sky, firmament; **heofona** *gpl.* 34
heold: *see* **healdan**
heorosceorp: *see* **heoruscearp**
heorusceorp *N n* warlike dress, war equipment; **heorosceorp** *as.* 73
herian (hergan) *wk v. I* praise, extol; **hergað** *pres. 3 pl.* 123
hī: see **hē**

[**ge-**]**hīeran = [ge-]hȳran** *wk v. I* hear, give ear to; **hȳrde** *pret. sbj. 1 pl.* 83; **gehȳrdon** *pret. 3 pl.* 90
Hierusalem *place name* Jerusalem 99; *ds.m* 128
hild *N f* war, battle; **hilde** *ds.* 37
him: *see* **hē**
hine: *see* **hē**
hinsīð *N m* journey hence, journey away, departure, death 7
his: *see* **hē**
hlāford *N m* lord, master, ruler; **hlāfordes** *gs.* 67
hliehhan *str v. VI* rejoice, laugh; **hlōgan** *pret. 3 pl.* 21; **hlyhhende** *pres. p.* 24
hlōgan: *see* **hliehhan**
hlyhhende: *see* **hliehhan**
hond: *see* **hand**
honda: *see* **hand**
hrēowan *wk v. II* be penitent, repent, sorry, grievous, miserable; **hrēowen**[**de**] *pres. p. pl.* 90; *see Commentary*
hū *adv.* how 76, 84, 90, 100, 104
hūru *adv.* however, yet, indeed, only 15
hwīl *N f* while, time; **hwīle** *as.* 5
hwilc/hwylc *interrog. prn. and adj.* which, whichever, who 43
hwonne *adv.* when 82
hwylc: *see* **hwilc**
hȳ: *see* **hē**
[**ge-**]**hȳdan** *wk v. I* hide, conceal; **gehȳddan** *past pf. 3 s.* 13
hyldo *N f* grace, favour, affection, kindness 67
hyra: *see* **hē**
hȳrde: *see* [**ge-**]**hīeran**
gehȳrdon: *see* [**ge-**]**hīeran**

I
Iācob *pers.* Jacob 44
ic *pers. prn.* I 30, 70, 73, 107, 118; **mē** *as.* me 26, 27, 28, 72, 74; *ds.* 71; **mīn** *gs.* my 70; **mīnum** *ds.* my 75
in *prep. + d/a* in, on, into 12, 15, 40, 71, 80, 86, 88, 97, 99, 100, 103, 104, 108, 128, 131, 132, 135
īnum: *see* **þīnum**
Iohannis *pers.* John 23, 50, 135
Iordāne *place name* Jordan 103, 131, 135
is: see **bēon**
Isac *pers.* Isaac 44
Iūdēi *N n* Jew; **Iūdēa** *gpl.* 13
Iūdēum *place name* Judea 99, 103, 128, 131
-ian *see* **Marian** 122; *see Commentary*

L
lang *adj.* long; **longe** *adv.* 54, 80
lǣdan *wk v. I (inf.)* lead, conduct, take, carry, bring, bring forth 39
lǣtan *str v VII* allow to remain, assign, allot; **lēte** *pres. sbj. 2 s.* 125
lēof = lēofa *adj.* dear, beloved, loved, pleasant, desirable 130
lēte: *see* **lǣtan**
libban = lifgan *wk v. III* live; **lifgende** *pres. p.* 102
līc *N n* body [living or dead], corpse 3, 19
lifgende: *see* **libban**
loc *N n* lock, bolt, bar; **locu** *n. pl.* 39

lof *N n/as.* praise, glory, a song of praise, hymn 102; *see* **lofian**
lofian *wk v. II* value, exalt, praise; **lofiað** *pres. 3 pl.* 123
longe: *see* **lang**
lufan: *see* **lufu**
lufu *N f* love, affection; **lufan** *ds.* 110
-lum: *see* **engel**; *see Commentary for lines 123–4*
[**ge-**]**lȳfan** *wk v. I* believe, trust, confide, hope; **gelȳfað** *pres. 2 pl.* 69; **gelȳfeð** *pres. 3 s.* 67

M
magan *anom. v.* may, be able, can; **mæge** *pres. sbj. 3 s.* 66; **meaht** *pres. 2 s.* 115, 116
mancynn *N n* mankind; **moncynne** *ds.* 113; **moncynnes** *gs.* 33
manig = monig *adj.* many, many a 45; **monigne** *as.* 62
mann = mon(n) *indef. prn. m* one, man 94; **monna** *gpl.* 109, 110
manþwære = monþwære *adj.* courteous, gracious, gentle, generous, meek, mild 77
Māria *pers.* Mary 9, 84; [**Mā**]**rian** *ds.* [122]
mæg *N m* kinsman, relative; **mæge** *ds.* 57; **mæges** *gs.* 25
mægburg *N f* race, tribe, nation; family, kindred 91
mæge: *see* **magan**
mæge: *see* **mæg**
mægenþrym[**m**] *N m* majesty, greatness, glory 22; *see Commentary*
mæges: *see* **mæg**
mægð *N f* woman, maiden, maid; **mægð** *nom. pl.* 1
mænan *wk v. I* lament, mourn, complain; [**mænd**]**on** *pret. 1 pl.* [91]; *see Commentary*
mē: *see* **ic**
***mē**[**c**]**:** *see* **mē**; *see Commentary for line 29*
mē[**der**]**:** *see* **mōdor**; *see Commentary for line 122*
meaht: *see* **magan**
mengeo *N f* multitude, crowd, great number; **mengo** *ds.* 25, 57
mengo: *see* **mengeo**
meotude: *see* **metod**
metod *N m* God; **meotude** *ds.* 137
mid *prep. + d or instrumental* with 10, 51, 55, 133, 136
middangeard *N m* world, earth, middle dwelling between Heaven and Hell 137
milde *adj.* mild, gentle, meek, merciful, gracious, generous 77
milts *N f* mercy, kindness; **miltsum** *dpl.* 113
[**ge-**]**miltsian** *wk v.* show mercy, have compassion, pity, pardon; **gemiltsie** *pres. sbj. 2 s.* 109
mīn: *see* **ic**
mīnum: *see* **ic**
mōd *N n* the inner man; mind, spirit, mood; courage, high spirit; pride, arrogance; of one mind 95; *see Commentary*; **mōde** *ds.* 134
mōdge: *see* **modig**
mōdig *adj.* dauntless, bold, brave, courageous, great 22, 25, 45, 57; **mōdge** *nom. pl.* 7, 94; **mōdi**]**gast** *superl.* 93; *see Commentary*; **mōdigne** *as.* 84
mōdi]**gast:** *see* **mōdig**
mōdigne: *see* **mōdig**
mōdor *N f* mother; *gs.* 110; **mē**[**der**] *ds.* [122]; *see Commentary*
molde *N f* earth; **moldan** *ds.* 22
mon: *see* **mann**
mōnað *N m* month *as.* 28; *see Commentary*
moncynne: *see* **mancynn**
moncynnes: *see* **mancynn**
monig: *see* **manig**
monigne: *see* **manig**

monna: *see* **mann**
monþwǽre: *see* **manþwǽre**
mōt *N n* meeting, an assembly, council, coming together; **gemōt** *ns* 2, 47; *see Commentary on line 2*
****mōtan** *anom. v.* be allowed, may, must, be obliged; **mōstan** *pret. 3 pl.* 101, 106; **mōste** *pret. 3 s.* 43
Moyses *pers.* Moses 45
mundbora *N m* protector, patron, guardian, advocate 75
murnan *wk v. III* mourn, grieve, lament, be sad, be anxious; **murnende** *pres. p.* 9, 91
mūð *N m* mouth *as.* 83
myndig *adj. n* mindful, thoughtful, remembering; **gemyndig** *ns* 77

N
nā = nō *adv.* no, not 64
nales: *see* **nealles**
nama *N m* name 122; *see Commentary on line 122*; ***naman** *as.*
ne *adv.* not 101; *cj.* neither, nor 37, 38, 39, 64, 66
nealles = nales *adv.* by no means, not, not at all 105, 112
nearwe *adv.* nearly, closely 64
nīðloca *N m* place of torment, place where one is shut up in misery; **nīðloc[an]** *as.* 64
nō: *see* **nā**
nū *adv.* now, 29, 73, 94, 107, 129; *cj.* because 61

O
of *prep. + d* of, from 40, 68
oferweorpan *wk v. III* sprinkle, throw (water, etc.) upon; **oferwurpe** *pret. 2 s.* 133
oflystan *wk v.* possess a very strong desire, desire; **oflyste** *pres. 1 pl. + g. of object.* 81
oft *adv.* often, oft 114
on *prep.* in, on 1, 9, 14, 16, 17, 27, 55, 61, 78, 81, 89, [91], [125], 126
onbryrdan *wk v.* instigate, stimulate, incite, inspire, animate; **onbryrdon** *pret. 2 pl.* 136
ond: *see* **and(e)**
ōnettan *wk v. I* hasten, move rapidly; **onette** *pret. 3 s.* 41
onfōn *str v. VII* receive, accept, take, lay hold, seize; **onfēng** *pret. 3 s.* 20
ongeat: *see* **ongietan**
ongietan *str v. V* perceive, see, recognize, understand, know; feel, be of opinion; **ongeat** *pret. 3 s.* 52
onginnan *str v. III (inf.)* set about, to begin, to prepare, set to work, to attempt, to endeavour, to undertake 36; **ongunnon** *pret. 3 pl.* 1
onwacan *str v. VI* to awake, cease to sleep; arise, be born; **onwōc** *pret. 3 s.* 21
open *adj. n* open, exposed, uncovered 19
ord *N m* chief, point, beginning; first man, point man 56; *see Commentary*
ōþer: *see* **ōþre**
ōþre *adj. f* other 10; **ōþer** *as. n* 15
oþrīdan *str v. I* proceed in, to hasten on; **ōþrād** *pret. 3 s.* 40
oþþæt *cj.* until 92
[**oððe**] *cj.* or 65; *see Commentary*

R
ræst: *see* **rest**
rēafian *wk v. II (inf.)* to seize, rob, plunder 36
reccan *wk v. I* direct, guide; care for, give concern/thought to; **rōhte** *pret. 3 s.* 37
rēon *N n* mourning, lamentation; **rēone** *ds.* 6; *see Commentary*
rest = ræst *N f* resting-place, place of rest; grave, bed 6

reðe *adj.* righteous, just; **reþust** *superl.* 36
rīce *adj.* powerful, mighty, great, strong 116
[**ge-**]**rīman** *wk v. (inf.)* to number, count, reckon 116
rōhte: *see* **reccan**

S
Sacharias *pers.* Zacharias, Zechariah 46
sandgrot *N n* grain of sand; **sondgrotu** *nom. pl.* 117
sārig *adj. f* sorrowful, full of grief, sad, sorry; **sārige** *nom. pl.* [60]; *see Commentary*; **sārigu** *nom. pl. n* 11
sægde: *see* **secgan**
sǣ *N m/f* sea; **sǣs** *gs.* 117
sceacen *str v. VI* hasten, flee, depart, expire; **sceacen** *pret. 3 s.* 29
sceal: *see* **sculan**
scearp *adj.* sharp, keen, acute 76
sceolde: *see* **sculan**
sceoldon: *see* **sculan**
scieppend = scyppend *N m* creator 109
scīnan *str v. I* shine; **scīnan** *pres. 3 pl.* 53
****sculan** *anom. v.* shall, ought, must; (*with inf.*) have, am, am bound/forced; **sceal** *pres. 3 s.* 129; **sceolde** *pret. 3 s.* 14; **sceoldon** *pret. 1 pl.* [61], 87; **sculon** *pres. 1 pl.* 98
scyppend: *see* **scieppend**
sē *pers. dem. prn.* he, she, it; *rel. prn.* who, which; *def. art.* that, the [29], 55, 70; **sēo** *nsf* 9; *def. art.* the 129; **þā** *rel. prn. apl. f* 16, 96; *nom. pl. n* 39; *apl. m* 102, 126; *as. f* 123; **þām / þam = þǣm** *def. art.* the 8, 14, 38; *dpl. f* those 40, 113; *dpl. m* 68; **þǣre** *def. art.* the, there, that 15, 25, 35, 37, 57, 100, 104, 120, 132; **þæs** *def. art. gs.n* of the, of that 15, 59, 64, 65, 86, 137; *adv.* so 80; **þæt** *def. art. as. n* that, so that 12, 19, 43, 73, 79, 85; **þone** *def. art. as. m* that, the 79; **þȳ** *def. art.* the 51, 66, 133, 136
sēcan *wk v. I (inf.)* to seek, to search for, to look for; visit 60, 127; **gesēcan** *inf.* 32; **gesōht[e]** *pres. sbj. 3 s.* 28; **gesōhtes** *pret. 2 s.* sought 111; [**sōhtest**] *pret. 2 s.* [92]; *see Commentary*; **sōhton** *pret. 3 pl.* 11
secgan *wk v. III* say (of written or spoken words), declare, tell; + *a* speak, tell, deliver 83; **sægde** *pret. 3 s.* 23
sēl *adj.* good, excellent, worthy; **sēlast** *superl.* 117, 119
self *prn.* self, own, own self; **sylfa** *nsm* [32], yourself 111; **sylfe** *apl. m* 96; **sylfes** *gs.m* 52, 83, 127
[**ge-**]**sellan** *wk v. I* give, give up, sell; **gesealdest** *pret. 2 s.* 72
sendan *wk v. I (inf.)* to send, to send forth 27
sēo: *see* **sē**
[**ge-**]**sēon** *str v. V* see, behold, observe 43; **geseah** *pret. 3 s.* 50, 53
set *N n* seat, habitation, house; **gesetu** *apl.* 115
setan: *see* **sittan**
sibb *N f* peace, unity, concord; a relationship; **sibbe** *gs.* 81
sibbe: *see* **sibb**
sīe: *see* **bēon**
siex *num.* six 28
sigebearn *N n* victorious son, victor-child; victorious warrior, victorious hero (applied to Christ) 32, *as.* 11, 50; **sygebearn** *as.* 43
sigedryhten *N m* victorious lord, lord of victory 92, 111
sigefæst *adj.* victorious, triumphant, secured with victory 23
simble = symle *adv.* forever, for all time, for eternity, always 137
singan *str v. III* sing, recite; **singað** *pres. 3 pl.* 102
sittan *str v. V* sit, reside, dwell, abide, sojourn 125; **sētan** *pret. 1 pl.* 81

sīð *N m* journey, course, expedition, mission, travel, path, way; *as.* [25], 27, 52; *adv.* previous, earlier, beforehand
sīþadest: *see* **sīþian**
sīþian *wk v. II* go, travel, journey, depart, wander; **sīþadest** *pret. 2 s.* 71
siþþan *cj.* since; after, when 71
snotor = snottor *adj.* wise, prudent, sagacious, discerning 23, 78
[**sōhtest**]: *see* **sēcan**
sōhton: *see* **sēcan**
sondgrotu: *see* **sandgrot**
sorg *N f* sorrow, grief, affliction, trouble, anxiety; **sorgum** *dpl.* 81
spræc: *see* **sprecan**
sprecan *str v. I* speak, utter; **spræc** *pret. 3 s.* 24, 57
standan *str v. VI* stand, remain, abide; **stondað** *pres. 3 pl.* 124
stille *adj.* still, fixed, quiet, unchanging, stable, undisturbed 100, 104
stondað: *see* **standan**
stōw *N f* place, spot, dwelling, locality; **stōwe** *ds.* 100, 104
swā *adv.* thus, so, in this way, therefore, on that account, nevertheless 69, 129
sweord *N n* sword; *as.* 72
swīþe *adv. in superl. + ful* fully, especially; much, very 30
swīðre *N n* right (hand, side, etc.); **swīþran** *as.* [125]
swylce /swilce *adv.* likewise, moreover, also, just as 47, 116, 118, 135
sygebearn: *see* **sigebearn**
sylfa: *see* **self**
sylfe: *see* **self**
sylfes: *see* **self**
symle: *see* **simble**
synn *N f* sin, transgression, misdeed, fault; **synne** *apl.* 96

T

tellan *wk v. I* tell, recount, narrate; reckon, consider; impute, ascribe, assign, put a thing to a person's account; [**telle**] *pres. 1 s.* 30; *see Commentary*
tō *prep. + d* to, for, into 2, 25, 33, 37, 38, 51, 57, 69, 71, 79, 85, 97, 98; *see* **tō- dæge**
tō-dæge *adv.* today 31
tū: *see* **twā**
twā = tū *num.* two 11

Þ

þā *cj. (in correlative combinations)* then . . . when; *adv.* that, thereupon, then, when 16, 27, 33, 39, 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 72, 79, 85, 126, 129; *see* **sē**
þām: *see* **sē**
þǣr *adv.* where, there 12, 17
þǣre: *see* **sē**
þæs: *see* **sē**
þæt *cj./adv.* that, so that 13, 14, 28, [31], 60, 66, 68, 75, 109; *see* **sē**
þē *rel. prn.* which, who 94; *def. art.* the, that, by that 8, 54, 101, 113, 124; *see* **þū**
þēah *adv.* yet, still, however, likewise, nevertheless 129
þearf *N f* need, necessity 114; **þearfe** *ds.* 112
***þē[c]:** *see* **þē**; *see Commentary on line 29*
þegn *N m* thane, vassal, retainer, soldier, servant 55
þēod *N f* people, nation, tribe; **þēoda** *gpl.* 112
þēoda: *see* **þēod**
þēoden *N m* prince, king, chief 59, 130
þēostru *N f* darkness, gloom; **þȳstre** *ds.* 55

þes *dem. prn.* this; **þisne** *as. m* 27, 126, 137; **þissum** *dpl. m* these 61
þīn *poss. prn. ns.n* your; **þīnes** *gs.m* 127, 130; **þīnre** *gs.m* 110, 112; *ds.f* 122; **þīnum** *ds.n* 78; *ds.m* 119, 121; **þȳnes** *gs.n* 106
þīnes: *see* **þīn**
þing *N n* thing, something, purpose 15
þīnre: *see* **þīn**
þīnum: *see* **þīn**
þisne: *see* **þes**
þissum: *see* **þes**
þonc *N m + d* thanks, gratitude 59, 137
þone: *see* **sē**
þonne *cj.* when, while 62, 67, 90, 114
þrēat *N m* troop, band, crowd, throng, host, swarm 17, 48
þringan *str v. III* press, press forward, crowd; **þrungon** *pret. 3 pl.* 42
þrym: *see* **þrymm**
þrymm *N m* host, great body of people, a force, multitude; (abstract significations) glory; **þrym** *as.* 35
þū *pers. prn. ns* you, thou 60, 71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 79, 84, 85, [92], 100, 104, 105, 108, 109, 110, 113, 115, 116, 125, 126, 133; **þē** *d/as. m* you, thou 59, 69, 96, 102, 107, 118, 124, 125; *see* **sē**
þurh *prep.* for, through, by 83, 95, 127
þȳ: *see* **sē**
þȳnes: *see* **þīn**
þȳstre: *see* **þēostru**

U
ūhte *N f/m* early morning, dawn, daybreak, twilight; **ūhtan** *as.* 1, 17
unc: *see* **wit**
under *prep.* among, in, under, below 64, 65, 87
unrīm *N n* countless number, huge host, innumerable amount, mass 49
ūre: *see* **wē**
ūrum: *see* **wē**
ūs: *see* **wē**
ūsic: *see* **ūs**
ūser: *see* **wē**
ūsse: *see* **wē**
ūssum: *see* **wē**

W
waldend: *see* **wealdend**
wǣre: *see* **bēon**
wǣron: *see* **bēon**
wæs: *see* **bēon**
wæter *N n* water, river, stream, sea; **wætre** *ds.* 133; **wætres** *gs.* 106
wætre: *see* **wæter**
wætres: *see* **wæter**
wē *prn. nom. pl.* we 61, 69, 80, 82, 86, 90, 95, 96; **ūs = ūsic**. *apl.* us [31] [60]; *dpl.* to/for us 79, 84, 85, 94, 96, 109, 126; **ūser** *gpl.* our 26, 59, 107, 118; **ūre** *poss. adj. nom. pl.* our 89; **ūrum** *dpl.* our 97; **ūsse** = **ūre** *gpl.* our 91, 95; **ūssum** *dpl.* our 98
weald *N n* power, strength, might, accord, efficacy; **geweald** *as.* 127
wealdend = waldend *N n* ruler, Lord, controller, master, governor, sovereign 112
weall *N m* wall; **weallas** *apl.* 34
weallas: *see* **weall**
weg *N m* a way, journey, path, road; *as. m* 16

wēnan *wk v. I* imagine, think, believe, opine; expect, hope for, look out for; **wēndan** *pret. 3 pl.* 14; **wēne** *pres. 1 s.* 30
wēn *N m* hope, expectation, belief; **wēnum** *dpl.* 82
weorc *N n* work, deed, labour, performance; **weorces** *gs.* 88
weordo: *see* **werod**
weoroda: *see* **werod**
weoruda: *see* **werod**
wērig *adj. n* desolate, forlorn, weary at heart, sad, grievous; **wērigu** *nom. pl.* 4
werod *N n* host, troop, band, multitude, crowd; **weordo** *nom. pl.* 48; **weoroda** *gpl.* 126; **weoruda** *gpl.* 42, 120, 133
wīde *adv.* widely, far 63
wīf *N n* woman, female person, lady; *nom. pl.* 4
wīfmann *N m* woman; **wīfmenn** *nom. pl.* 16; **wīfmonna** *gpl.* 48
wīfmenn: *see* **wīfmann**
wīfmonna: *see* **wīfmann**
wilcuma *N m* welcome one, guest, one whose coming is pleasant; **wilcuman** *as.* 58
willan *anom. v.* will, wish; purpose, think, mean, intend; **wille** *pres. sbj. 3 s.* 31, 68; **woldan** *pret. 3 pl.* 4; **wolde** *pret. 3 s.* 27, 34, 39; **woldest** *pret. 2 s.* 60, 127
wilnian *wk v. II (inf.)* to beg, desire, ask for, supplicate 98
wīs *adj. f* wise, discreet, judicious, learned, skilled, an expert 78
wiston: *see* **witan**
wit *dual prn.* we two, I and thou, you and I 132; **unc** *pers. prn.* us two 132
witan *anom. v. str/wk I* know, have knowledge, be aware; **wiston** *pret. 3 pl.* 2, 12, 16; *see Commentary on line 2*; **wītod** *pres. 1 s.* 30
wītega *N m* wise man, prophet, one with special knowledge; **wītgena** *gpl.* 48
witt *N n* understanding, wit, sense, intellect, mind; **gewitte** *ds.* 78
woldan: *see* **willan**
wolde: *see* **willan**
woldest: *see* **willan**
wōp *N m* weeping, lamentation 4; **wōpe** *ds.*
word *N n* word, speech; *as.* 82; **worde** *ds.* 78; **wordum** *dpl.* 58
wræcc *N m* wretch, exile, outcast, wanderer; **wræccan** *nom. pl.* 42, 63
wræcsīð *N m* journey of exile, banishment, pilgrimage; wretchedness, misery; (*figuratively*) living out of Heaven; *as.* 126
wuldorgifu *N f* glorious gift, gift of Heaven, grace; **wuldorgiefa** *as.* 42
wund *N f* wound, injury; **wunde** *ds.* 120
[ge-]wunian *wk v. II* remain, stay, abide, continue; **gewunadest** *pret. 2 s.* 100, 104
wyn(n) *N f* joy, rapture, pleasure, delight, ecstasy 18, 74; *as.* 121; **wynne** *ds.* 55; **wynnum** *dpl.* 82, 89, 106

Y

ymb(e) *prep./adv.* by, about, round, after 25, [28], 124
ymbfōn *str v. VII (inf.)* to embrace, grasp, encompass, surround 115
ȳð: *see* **ēaðe**

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